VANITY FAIR®

Volume 52 Number 4 April 1989

Deneuve of her? Page 164.

Jacobs ladder? Page 160.

Nivet, Mayor? Page 152

Features

Columns

Et Cetera

Cover

Griffith Spark

Melanie Griffith's dress by Giorgio di Sant'Angelo, $450, from Barneys New York and Martha's, Palm Beach. Jewelry from Tiffany & Co. Hair by Odile for Bruno Dessange. Makeup by Francois Nars. Styled by Marina Schiano. Photographed exclusively for *Vanity Fair* by Annie Leibovitz.

Credits: page 229.

 Vanity Fair (ISSN 0733-8899) is published monthly by the Condé Nast Publications Inc. Condé Nast Building, 350 Madison Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Bernard H. Leser, President, Eric C. Anderson, Vice President–Treasurer Pamela M. van Zandt, Vice President–Secretary. Second-class postage paid at N.Y., N.Y. 10001, and at additional mailing offices. Subscriptions in the United States and its possessions, $12 for one year, $22 for two years. In Canada $22 for one year, $42 for two years. Elsewhere, $28 for one year, payable in advance. Single copies, $2 in the United States, $2.50 in Canada. For subscriptions, address changes, and adjustments, write to *Vanity Fair*, Box 53516, Boulder, Colo. 80322. The first copy of a new subscription will be mailed within eight weeks of receipt of order. Eight weeks is required for change of address; please give both new address and old as printed on last label. Address all editorial, production, and business correspondence to *Vanity Fair*, 350 Madison Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Manuscripts, photographs, drawings, and other material submitted must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. However, *Vanity Fair* cannot be responsible for unsolicited material. **Postmaster:** Send Form 3579 to *Vanity Fair*, Box 53516, Boulder, Colo. 80322. **Subscription inquiries:** Please write to *Vanity Fair*, Box 53516, Boulder, Colo. 80322, or call 800-365-0635.

MURDER IN THE RAIN FOREST

Chico Mendes with his wife and children last May, seven months before he was killed.

, Protect the Amazon Is Killed at His Home

g defended himself
Speech on Dec 8 that
death threats and he
ne up to be gunned
recently that we peo
his movement had
eat months

ive the Amazon's rub
an economy from took
Washington last year at
environmental groups
d Bank and the Inter

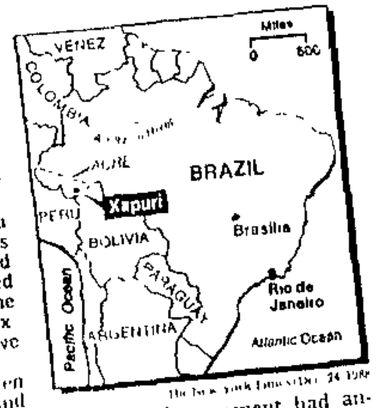
the as skillful managers who harvest the forest without seriously damaging it They carve incisions into rubber trees to let the sap, the latex, leak out

They often collect edible plants, fruits and nuts, and their way of life has served to bolster arguments that it is worth setting aside reserves for the tappers because they can make a profit from the forest while preserving it "A rubber tree can live up to 100 years if you tap it right, affectionately," Mr Mendes said

against rubber barons who abused their workers and tried to prevent independent tappers from selling their products

Unions all over Acre grew into a movement of some 10,000 people as tappers found themselves evicted and saw huge areas of the jungle cleared for cattle and agriculture At the same time, they saw that land was often exhausted and abandoned after five years while the forest was destroyed

"We became ecologists without even knowing that word," Mr Mendes said in an interview on Dec 9



The New York Times/Dec 24 1988

The Xapuri movement had angered some wealthy businessmen

Dorci Alves, the twenty-one-year-old son of a local rancher, confessed to Chico's murder He is thought to be the tool of a vicious right-wing organization of landowners

One evening Chico Mendes stepped out his back door and was blasted by a twenty-gauge shotgun. It could have been just another killing in Brazil's badlands, but Mendes was a central figure in the worldwide movement to save the rain forest, a sort of Amazonian Gandhi, and he immediately became an environmental cause celebre. ALEX SHOUMATOFF journeys to a remote corner of western Brazil to investigate and chronicle a death foretold

One afternoon a few weeks after Chico Mendes was murdered at his home in Xapuri, deep in the Brazilian Amazon, two thousand miles from the *dolce vita* of Rio de Janeiro, I went into the rain forest with Raimundo Gadelha, Chico's thirty-year-old brother-in-law. Xapuri is in the state of Acre, a wedge the size of Iowa that straddles the frontier with Bolivia and Peru and is one of the most remote parts of Amazonia. Ninety percent of Acre is still primeval. Within a hundred miles of Xapuri, in the southernmost part of the state, there are Indian villages no modern person has entered, and God knows how many unidentified species of animals and plants. But as in many parts of the Amazon, the forest is rapidly shrinking as ranchers, settlers, and greedy land speculators attack it with chain saws and fire.

So much of the immediate area around Xapuri has already been cleared that we had to travel fifty minutes up the Xapuri River in a briskly moving outboard-powered skiff to reach the nearest patch of forest. "We are leaving the world of lies and dirty dealing," Raimundo said as we passed under the socklike nests of a colony of crested oropendolas dripping from the branches of a silk-cotton tree. A pair of green parrots with yellow wings flew overhead, followed by a pair of green parrots with red wings. We waved to a boy in a dugout pulling in a trapline of thrashing silver fish—probably *piranambu*, larger, less toothy relatives of the piranha. Raimundo reeled off the names of several kinds of delicious catfish that swim in the river. I asked if there were any *candirú*. He laughed and said, "Loads of them." The *candirú* is a small catfish, the size of a toothpick, that wriggles into mammalian orifices and then throws out an excruciatingly painful set of retrorse spines. It can only be removed surgically.

Soon after passing a stand of twenty-foot-tall plumed reeds we put ashore and made our way up the steep, slippery bank through a small blizzard of cabbage butterflies to where three men were waiting with their dogs. "*Opa*," Raimundo said, and we shook hands with Antonio, Francisco, and João Roque de Nascimento, three brothers who tap the wild rubber trees in the forest. Many of the roughly 300,000 tappers in the Brazilian Amazon live in Acre. The brothers, who had known Chico Mendes all their lives, work the same *estradas*, or rubber trails, that their father and grandfather did. Each *estrada* is a circular loop with about 180 rubber trees, naturally spaced among hundreds of other kinds of trees over several hundred acres to protect them from insect predators. The three men usually leave their homes at five A.M. to cut a new inverted vee in each tree and to jam a tin can under the "milk" that oozes out. The trees are scored with chevrons of cuts made over the years. Two hours later they return to collect the latex, which they spend the rest of the day smoking and coagulating into rubber—a nasty job. In an average year they produce about 1,200 kilos, which nets them maybe $1,300, enough cash for their families' needs, since they grow, hunt, gather, and fish almost all of their food. But at this time of year, the daily deluges of the wet season make tapping impracticable—"It'd take you five days to gather two days' worth of rubber," Antônio told me—so today they were gathering Brazil nuts, their next-most-important cash crop.

The brothers took me down one of their *estradas* and showed me the green pods of wild *cacau*—chocolate—sprouting right from the trunk, the fresh tracks of an armadillo, the tree they made dugouts from, a bamboo whose roots, steeped in water, reduce swelling, the place where João had met head-on with a jaguar just last week, the *copaíba* tree, whose high-octane sap you can supposedly pour into your gas tank and drive off with, and dozens of other marvelous things. They told me about the *cablocinho da mata*, the Father of the Forest, who spirits off your dogs if you shoot more than one deer a week, and about the Mother of the Water, a large serpent who upsets your canoe if you catch more fish than you need. We stood listening to the liquid improvisations of the *urapuru*, the gray-flanked musician wren. "He is the poet of the forest," Antônio explained. He said how important it was not to tap the trees too often, to let the trees rest, or the milk would turn to water. "You fall on a forest like this, *senhor*, and it gives you everything."

Acre also has its raw, violent side. It's one of those parts of Brazil where, for instance, when someone calls you up and tells you that you are going to die, it is not so much a threat as a statement of fact. You have been, in the Portuguese term, *anunciado*. The *anúncio*, a Brazilian friend explained to me, is a form of torture. You increase the pleasure of killing your victim by first destroying him psychologically. So when Chico Mendes, who had organized the rubber tappers of Acre into a union and who was emerging as a major player in the fight to save the Amazon, was *anunciado* last May, he knew it was no idle threat. He had already survived five attempts on his life. The last would-be assassin had slipped on a loose board while climbing up to the roof of the Rural Workers Union headquarters in Xapuri, where Chico was presiding over a meeting. He had been in danger since 1980, when his mentor, Wilson Pinheiro, the union president in the next town, was gunned down by *pistoleiros* on the steps of the union hall. The rubber tappers killed a rich local rancher, Nilão de Oliveira, in retaliation, believing him to have been one of the *mandantes*, the masterminds of the murder. Knowing that Nilão's friends would be looking for him, Chico had gone into hiding for ninety days, sleeping each night in the house of a different *companheiro*.

Chico knew that his enemies included not only the ranchers who hired *pistoleiros* to expel the rubber tappers from the forest and to kill their leaders and sympathizers, but the authorities in Acre themselves. Mauro Spósito, the state superintendent of the Federal Police, had publicly denounced him as a police informant and Communist agitator. He knew that he was on the *lista negra*, the hit list of the secret death squad of the Department of Public Safety. He also knew that eighty-eight union leaders had been killed in Brazil the year before, and that since 1980 land conflicts had resulted in more than a thousand murders. In Xapuri itself there hasn't been a jury trial in twenty-three years; dozens of murder cases are sitting in the judge's desk drawer because no one dares prosecute them.

One night the previous March, Chico had been walking home from the union

hall with six *companheiros* when he saw the Alves brothers, Darli and Alvarino, coming down the street, Alvarino looking like a Wild West badman with his cowboy hat and his bandido mustache—a look he apparently cultivated. The other brother, Darli, had recently acquired dubious title to the Seringal Cachoeira, the rubber forest where Chico had been born and raised, where his family has lived and tapped the trees for generations. Darli had been telling people that he was tired of the "confusion" Chico was causing with his blockades of the ranchers' bulldozers and chain-saw crews. When Darli and Alvarino got within firing range they started to take their guns out, but Chico's friends surrounded him, forming a protective wall. The brothers passed by, jeering.

The Alves brothers, who have managed to consolidate by one means or another a six-thousand-acre ranch outside of Xapuri, are rough, semi-literate, frontier types with violent pasts. The head of the family is Sebastião Alves da Silva, now eighty-six, who had twenty-six children by three women and adopted three more. In 1958 the Alveses were living in a little place in the state of Minas Gerais called Ipanema when three of Sebastião's sons, Darli, Alvarino, and Dari, shot a drover named Nequinha da Doca sixteen times and his son six. Even Nequinha's horse received a hailstorm of lead. The fight was over a woman both Sebastião and Nequinha wanted. The family then fled south, to Parana, where they gunned down one of their neighbors, Dirceu Dos Santos, in a dispute over property lines, and lured another to the local red-light district where they murdered him in a crime whose motive, according to the inquest, was "perversity." One of Sebastião's girlfriends said in her deposition that "the Alveses killed because they found it was good to kill."

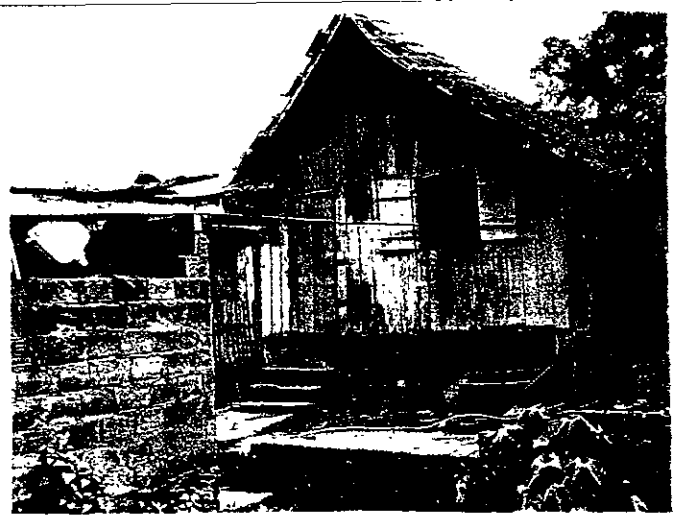
Again the family found it advisable to relocate, this time to Acre, where land was going for practically nothing. In 1974 they bought a small ranch outside Xapuri. Darli Alves was as prolific as his father, producing some thirty children. He left one of his women, Elpídia, in Paraná, but brought two others, Natalina and Zilde, and picked up two more locally—Margarete and Chiquinha, a neighbor's daughter, who was sixteen when he seduced her and persuaded her to run away and live with him. Darli was thirty years older.

Once in Acre, the family continued their violent ways. In 1977, with the help of Darli's partner, Gaston Mota, they massacred an entire family of tappers. The director of the Judicial Police came from Rio Branco, the capital of Acre, a hundred miles northeast of Xapuri, and arrested twelve of Darli's *pistoleiros* and Darli himself as he was getting on a bus. But they were all freed by writs of habeas corpus, and the crime wasn't even registered.

The taste for killing was transmitted to the next generation, particularly to two of Darli's sons, Darci and Oloci. A lot of the killing took place right on the ranch. The peons lived in fear. One has testified that he saw Darci and Oloci shoot a peon who was sleeping off a drunken *festa* the night before. Once on the ranch the only way to leave was by running away. If you quit and asked for your pay you were ambushed before you got to the road. Last October 9 the bodies of two Bolivian brothers, one a law student, the other a medical student, who are believed to have been running drugs for Darli, were found on the ranch, one laid out on the other in the form of a cross. Darci and Oloci are accused of killing them.

Several weeks after the Alves brothers had confronted Chico on the street in Xapuri, a voice called "Help, Chico, help" from the darkness outside the house where he was sleeping with his wife, Ilzamar, and their two children. Ilza peered through a crack in the wall and saw a strange man waiting at the door with one hand behind his back. In May, after Chico was *anunciado*, friends appealed to the governor to provide him with protection, and two military policemen were assigned to guard him.

In the rearview mirror of his truck, Chico saw *pistoleiros* tailing him. He heard about a meeting of ranchers that was called to plan his death, and he gave the police a list of the twelve most likely suspects in the event of his assassination. The Alves brothers were on it. He predicted to his *companheiros* that he would not live to see the new year. His premonition was correct: he was killed three days before Christmas.

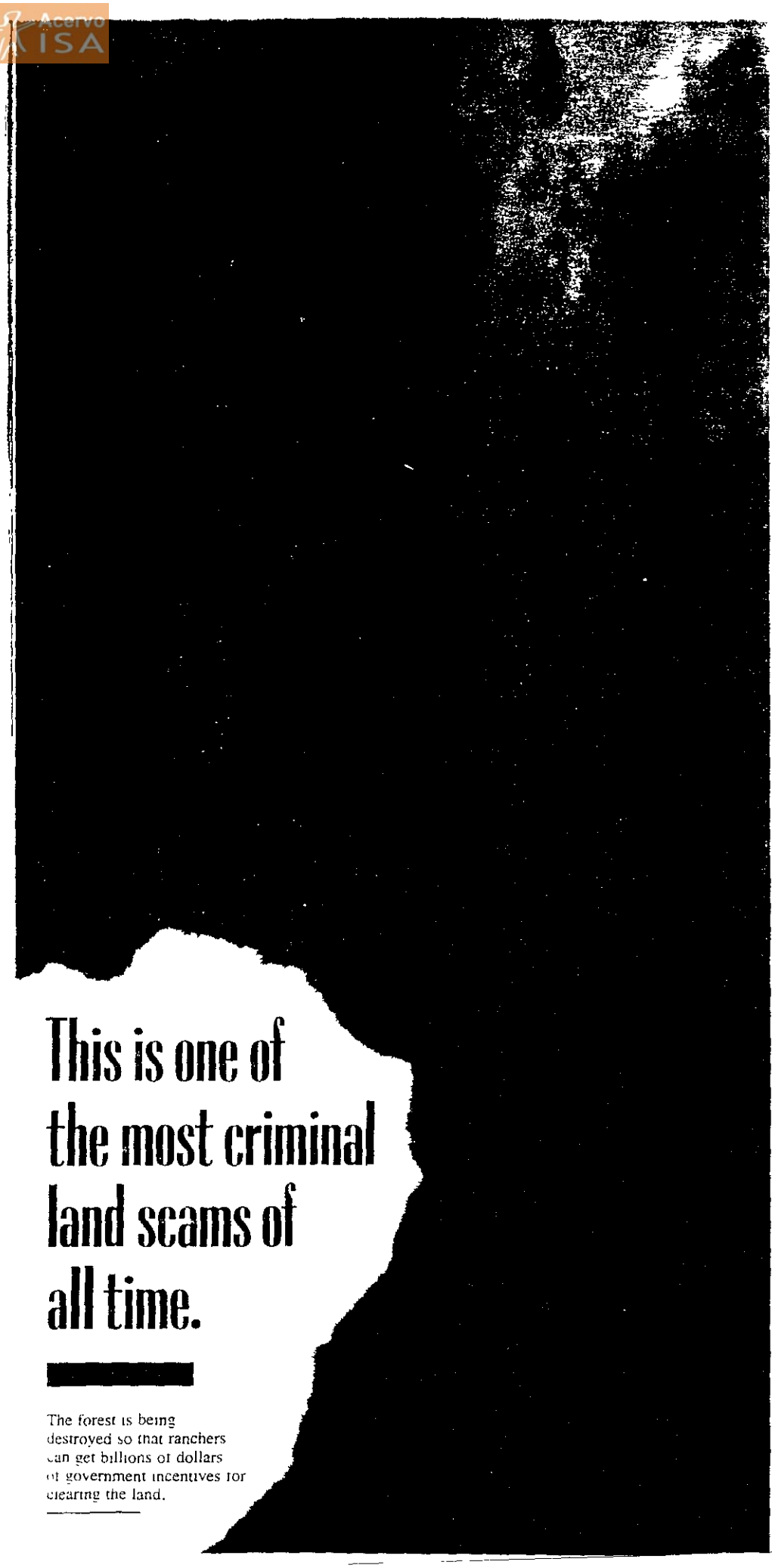


Chico was going to take a shower in a building behind his house when he was shot.

Raimundo led me through the dense tangle to the place the killers had waited.

The news of Chico Mendes's murder was greeted by a tremendous international outcry that took the ranchers completely by surprise. The crime had focused a growing anxiety in the United States and Europe about the fires in the Amazon and the effect all the carbon dioxide they are spewing into the atmosphere might be having on the world's climate. Last year a murderous-

WILSON PEDROSA



This is one of the most criminal land scams of all time.

The forest is being destroyed so that ranchers can get billions of dollars of government incentives for clearing the land.

ly hot summer parched an area from New Mexico to Pennsylvania and from Idaho to South Carolina. Forty percent of the counties in the U.S. were declared drought areas. Worldwide, 1988 turned out to be the warmest year on record. The climate was clearly out of whack, and it was obvious that, as ecologists have been warning for decades, we are poisoning the planet. Suddenly a term, "the greenhouse effect," coined in the thirties for the buildup of atmospheric carbon dioxide that traps solar energy and heats up the earth's surface, was on everyone's lips.

More than half of the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere comes from the burning of fossil fuel by internal-combustion engines, especially those in cars, and virtually all the rest is from the incineration of "modern biomass," especially the tropical rain forests. The fires in the Amazon account for something like 17 percent of the total. The greatest single contributor of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere is in fact the United States, but in the curious way such things happen, everyone became very concerned about the rain forest. And Chico Mendes, a poor rubber tapper and union organizer few outside of Acre and the small world of rain-forest conservationists had ever heard of, became a symbol of the cause. Both he and the conservationists were fighting to stop the burning of Amazonia, he to save the tappers' way of life and they to save the planet, and he had been killed for it.

Within days a Chico Mendes Committee was formed and letters were sent to the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank urging that all funding of development projects in the Amazon be suspended until a full investigation was made. The Brazilian government, under pressure to do something fast, announced that the Ministry of External Affairs had created a Division of Ecology and Human Rights (to handle all the flak it was getting in these areas), and that the director general of the Federal Police in Brasília would be personally overseeing the case. Special investigators were sent to the scene, including the forensic team that had identified the remains of Josef Mengele. Chico's body was exhumed so that the team could reconstruct the angle and distance of fire.

Two days after the murder, twenty-

one-year-old Darci Alves had walked into the police station in Xapuri and confessed to the killing. His motive, he explained, was that Chico had been "harassing" his father, Darli. Beyond that he remained as tight-lipped as James Earl Ray, except to say that he had acted alone, which was clearly a lie. Two men with guns had been seen running from the scene by numerous witnesses, and there was evidence that for days before the murder two men had camped in the dense thicket behind Chico's house. One of them smoked Charm cigarettes, and Darci doesn't smoke. He didn't explain why he had turned himself in, but he was widely believed to be the *boi de piranha*, the steer for the piranhas, i.e., a scapegoat. The head of the Federal Police in Brasília referred to him also as a "smoke screen." The police were almost certain that his accomplice was his mulatto brother-in-law Jerdeir, a.k.a. Antônio, a.k.a. Francisco, Pereira, one of three brothers, nicknamed the Mineirinhos, who worked as *pistoleiros* and ranch hands for the Alveses. Darci's father and his uncle, Darli and Alvarino, were suspected of being the *mandantes*.

Meanwhile, Darli, Alvarino, and the Mineirinhos had fled into the forest and were being hunted by sixty agents of the Federal Police, including a crack team with special jungle training, sixty military police, and thirty civil police. Bloodhounds and a helicopter were converging on the scene, and the fugitives were expected to be brought in momentarily, preferably alive because there were a lot of questions they were going to have to answer. Stories were beginning to surface about the strange goings-on at Darli's ranch, the Fazenda Paraná—stories about a cemetery in the forest where the brothers buried their victims, about a fisherman pulling a skull out of a pond.

There was widespread speculation that the murder of Chico Mendes was a complicated affair involving drug and arms smuggling, clandestine airstrips, a radical right-wing ranchers' organization called the Rural Democratic Union (U.D.R.), and the secret death squad within the Acre Department of Public Safety. But overshadowing all these wild, range-war aspects of the situation were the global resonances of the event. Here in this remote part of a vast, fragile land, the interests of environmental protection and social justice, of the oppressed rubber tappers and the millions of other species that inhabit the Amazon rain forest, coincided—a rare event in Third World conservation. And Chico Mendes had joined the thin ranks of a new kind of saint: the eco-martyr.

"You can't imagine what it's like with Darli in bed," one of his harem raved.

Francisco "Chico" Mendes Filho was born on the fifteenth of December 1944, on the Seringal Cachoeira, two days' walk from Xapuri. There were no schools or health clinics out there. The forest was Chico's first teacher. Instead of memorizing multiplication tables, he watched rainbow-billed toucans gobbling *paxiúba* palm nuts and deduced the basic plant-animal relationships. "I became an ecologist long before I had ever heard the word," he would say years later.

In 1962, when Chico was seventeen, a stranger appeared at the Mendeses' doorstep. He was a tapper, but he talked differently from anyone Chico had heard. "I was fascinated by the way he ex-

Darli Alves (*above*), the father of the confessed killer, who probably ordered the murder, had a Manson-like ménage on his ranch. His brother Alvarino (*right*) is still a fugitive.

Chico knew that he was on the death squad's *lista negra*, its hit list.

Chico's right side was riddled with buckshot (*inset*). Padre Luis, the liberation-theology priest who officiated at his funeral, has also been threatened

Eva Evangelista, the president of the Tribunal of Justice, was threatened with death after she appointed a special prosecutor for the murder case.

pressed himself." Chico recalled in a series of talks just before his death with the sociologist Cândido Grzybowski. "He had a few newspapers with him. At that time I had never seen a newspaper and I didn't know what it was."

The stranger lived by himself in a shack in the forest three hours' walk from where Chico beached his dugout. Together the two of them would work slowly through the political columns of the papers that the stranger received two or three months late, and soon Chico had learned to read. Sometimes he would stay awake all night, listening as the stranger told him the amazing story of his life. He had been one of a group of leftist lieutenants who in 1935 had tried unsuccessfully to stage a revolution. He was imprisoned on the island of Fernando de Noronha, escaped, became a Communist guerrilla in Pará, was hunted down by the dread *cangaceiros*, marauding cossacklike bandits who terrorized the backlands of northeastern Brazil, was imprisoned again, escaped, and fled this time to Bolivia, where he organized tin miners' strikes, and with the police on his tail escaped over the border to Acre. It was only after a year that he told Chico his name: Euclides Fernandes Távora. The Távoras were a famous family of revolutionaries.

In 1964 there was a military revolution in Brazil, and a dark period of persecution ensued for anyone smelling vaguely leftist—artists, intellectuals, university students. Deep in the forest, Távora and Chico would turn on the radio and listen to the Voice of America claiming that the revolution had been a victory for democracy (when in fact it had set democracy back twenty years), then they would tune in Radio Moscow, which said that the coup had been backed by the C.I.A. (which it was) and that the real patriots were being imprisoned, tortured, massacred, driven into exile. One day in 1965 Távora went to town for supplies and vanished. He was probably picked up by *militares*.

The physical Távora was *desaparecido*, but his ideas lived on. He had transformed Chico into a political man.

When I flew up to Acre from Rio de Janeiro, we passed through three time zones. One could not help but be impressed by the enormity and the emptiness of the Brazilian interior. Culturally, climatically, and ecologically the North and South of Brazil are two different worlds. The South is modern, European, and temperate. The North is torrid, Neolithic. Only 7 percent of the population lives in Amazonia, which makes up 58 percent of the national territory.

We stopped in Brasília, the capital built from scratch in the late fifties in the middle of nowhere, and then proceeded to Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso, a famous ex-Nazi stronghold. I remembered the last time I'd been in Cuiabá, in 1982. The state chief of protocol, who met me at the airport, had a toothbrush mustache and had served in the SS. He kept clicking his heels. I had come to see the Pantanal do Mato Grosso, the world's biggest swamp, bigger than England, with an incredible profusion of wildlife, millions of caimans floating in the water, monumental logjams of caimans as far as the eye could see. Poaching the caimans is a big business. Planes fly in from Bolivia with cocaine and fly out with caiman skins, which are said to provide an important part of the Bolivian G.N.P. No money changes hands.

The Amazon rain forest starts north of Cuiabá, and though it is being cut back farther and farther and huge patches of it are being gouged out and incinerated, it is still the world's largest and most biologically diverse wilderness, blanketing an area two-thirds the size of the continental United States, with a tenth of the world's species, most of them still unidentified, new trees being discovered all the time, more kinds of fish than there are in the Atlantic, the world's largest catfish, the largest cockroach, finch-eating spiders, and no fewer than 319 kinds of hummingbird.

The great forest remained more or less intact until 1969, when the government, in an effort to tame and take possession of that vast teeming terra incognita to the north and to secure the national borders, enacted its National Integration Program—an ambitious and expensive road-building and colonization scheme whose centerpiece was the 3,500-mile Trans-Amazon Highway. The idea was to get some of the 30 million dirt-poor *nordestinos* to settle along the road, and to persuade large investors to clear the forest and produce beef for the First World.

The government offered tremendous incentives to anyone who was willing to come up to the Amazon and raise cattle: loans at interest rates below the rate of inflation, tax holidays, land concessions. Ranchers from the South and even multinational corporations lured by the promise of big profits moved in. Gangs of chain saws and bulldozers started leveling the forest, and some of the largest fires in recorded history were set. In the fall of 1976, when I arrived in the Amazon to spend eight months collecting material for a Sierra Club book, a fire as big as Rhode Island was raging out of control on the Volkswagen AG ranch in Pará, in eastern Amazonia. I visited a subsidiary of the King Ranch of Texas, also in Pará, where the heat from the tremendous walls of flame was so intense that it created local fire storms, complete with thunder, lightning, and mini-tornadoes. I saw huge trees that had been blasted into the air and had landed upside down with their root buttresses sticking up like the fins of crashed rocket ships.

The same thing happened in Acre. Ranchers from the South began pouring in as early as 1970, after the completion of a road linking Rio Branco with Cuiabá and Porto Velho, the capital of

PHOTOGRAPHS LEFT BY ALEX HOUMATOS; RIGHT, BOTTOM BY WILSON PFDROSA

Rondônia, the next territory to the east. The plan of Governor Wanderley Dantas, who invited them, was to convert the state's economic base from rubber to cattle. The tappers, who constituted virtually the entire rural population, and the forest they depended on were just going to have to make way for progress. The methods that were used to move the tappers out were the same ones used in North America to remove the Indians from 1818 on—fraud and violence—and similar arguments about eminent domain and Manifest Destiny were used to justify rolling over this defenseless subculture. No one except Chico had tried to explain to the tappers that they had rights like other people, and most of them just left the forest as they were told. Twelve thousand families went over to Bolivia and started tapping rubber in an area that has become, with Bolivian *campesinos* beginning to pour in, another time bomb of social conflict. Others headed for Rio Branco, doubling and tripling its population and ringing it with slums.

By 1976 the ranchers controlled two-thirds of Acre. Many had expanded their original government grants by a practice known as *grilagem*, or land fraud, notoriously widespread in Brazil, where town clerks, if the price is right, are often willing to make out a false title to any piece of property your heart desires. Under Brazilian law anyone who occupies and cultivates a piece of land for a year and a day has squatter's rights to it; he becomes what is known as a *posseiro*, a "possessor." After five years he can gain clear title if he registers his claim at the town clerk's, but few *posseiros* have the funds or the know-how to do so. Theoretically a *posseiro* can't be evicted from his land unless he is compensated for the improvements he has made, but in practice *posseiros* are evicted all the time all over Brazil by *pistoleiros* in the employ of new owners whose titles have been obtained by *grilagem*. Once he has been physically evicted, the *posseiro* loses his rights.

The tragedy of what is happening in the Amazon might be more understandable if significant amounts of beef were being produced on the cleared land, but that is not the case. The Amazon in fact imports more beef than it exports. The real reason the forest is being destroyed is so that the ranchers can get the billions of dollars of government incentives. They can do so by showing "productive use" of the land, and the cheapest way to do that is to clear and burn it and turn a few head of cattle loose on it. A lot of the land is held in speculation. If the government puts a road near or through the land, it can be sold for hundreds of times the original purchase price. This is one of the most criminal land scams, one of the most unconscionable hit-and-run operations, of all time, because in five or ten years the pasture turns into a barren, brick-hard wasteland that may take centuries to recover. The soils of Amazonia, contrary to what you'd expect, are very thin. The lushness of the rain forest is the result of a delicate balancing act, a frenetic recycling of nutrients and rainwater from the forest floor back up into the trees. Once the trees are taken down, the whole system collapses. The soil soon shrivels up in the sun and blows away or is washed away by the rain.

Special investigators included the forensic team that had identified the remains of Josef Mengele.

The ranchers were called *paulistas*, because many of them came from the state of São Paulo. The *paulistas* hung out at the restaurant at the Rio Branco airport, talking about cattle and women in the same crude terms, and carving the state up among themselves. Recent satellite photos reveal that they have denuded 6 to 10 percent of Acre, which isn't as much as in some parts of Amazonia: in Rondônia, for instance, the clearing and burning started only in this decade, and it is already 17 to 35 percent gone. That so much of Acre's forest is intact can be directly attributed to the energy and courage of Chico Mendes.

By 1975 Chico was beginning to persuade the tappers that they could stand up to the ranchers. He devised a brilliant tactic known as the *empate*. An *empate* in chess is a draw, so perhaps in this situation it could be translated as a standoff, but it really was a blockade. When Chico heard about a part of the forest that was about to be cleared, he would round up the two or three hundred families who lived there and get them to form a wall on the edge of it so the bulldozers and chain-saw crews couldn't enter. He would put the women and children in front so that the *pistoleiros* and the police the ranchers had hired wouldn't dare shoot, while he walked the line gently reassuring his *companheiros*—there is video footage of this—"Don't be afraid, nothing's going to happen." Chico came up with the *empate* intuitively, completely on his own. He had never heard of Gandhi or Martin Luther King. He simply took the somnolent passivity of the tappers and turned it into a form of resistance. In thirteen years he organized forty-five *empates* and saved nearly three million acres of forest.

Despite the village priest's denunciations of him, and intimidation by the police, Chico not only succeeded in setting up a local of the Rural Workers' Union in Xapuri but was elected town councilman. These victories did not ingratiate him with the ranchers. In December 1979 four hooded men bundled him into a car in Rio Branco, beat him nearly senseless, and dumped him on a back road. The following year Wilson Pinheiro was gunned down on the steps of his local. The two *pistoleiros* were identified and even how much they were paid was learned, but nothing was done. The only policeman who showed an interest in investigating the murder was fired. The tappers wanted blood, and even though Chico pleaded that that was not the way—one of his favorite sayings was "I don't believe in bodies"—they took matters into their own hands and went out to Nilão de Oliveira's ranch, tried him, found him guilty, and executed him on the spot. This time the wheels of justice turned with amazing speed. Hundreds of tappers were imprisoned and tortured.

Some had their fingernails yanked out with pliers.

None of the devastation that Chico had tried to curtail was visible through the window on the plane from Cuiabá to Rio Branco. It was the wet season, and Acre was totally socked in. The clearing and burning wouldn't start again until May. There was nothing for the *paulistas* to do at this time of year except eliminate their enemies.

It had been raining for twenty-four hours straight, the taximan who drove me into town from the airport said. We crossed a bridge over the swollen muddy Rio Acre, whose banks were lined with the open, flat-roofed, double-decker riverboats typical of Amazonia. The river was still the best way to bring goods from Manaus, a thousand extravagantly meandering miles downstream. Rio Branco seemed much smaller than its most recent population estimate of 250,000. It has a main plaza and a couple of neoclassical administrative buildings, but from there it degenerates into a squalid sprawl of shacks and concrete pillboxes. There was a floating population of rough frontier types, shooting snooker and brawling in the bars, eyeing the traffic. They all looked like killers, and I wondered whom I could trust. Not the police, clearly. I definitely didn't want to show too much curiosity about their death squad. Only a few days earlier a journalist who had been investigating the death squad in the Department of Public Safety in Manaus had turned up dead. It was also probably a good idea to distance myself from the environmental movement. Roberto Caiado, the president of the U.D.R. (the radical right-wing ranchers' organization), had accused Chico in a recent press conference of being a "tool of the ecologists," who were (this was a new one) "agents of North American leftist imperialism." I definitely didn't want to be taken for one of them. Being American was enough of a liability. As far as I could tell, there were only three good guys in Rio Branco: the bishop, Dom Moacyr Grechi; the president of the Tribunal of Justice, Eva Evangelista—both of whom had been *anunciados* shortly after Chico's murder—and Silvio Martinello, the editor of the *Gazeta*, one of the local papers.

The bishop sometimes criticized Chico for going too far, but he was basically a friend. He conducted the funeral mass. "Happy are those persecuted for the cause of justice, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven," he had said, and then the coffin was sealed and taken down the steps through a crowd with placards saying "Justice" and "Death to the U.D.R." The next day Dom Moacyr got a call from a man who said that he had been hired with the *pistoleiro* Luis Garimpeiro to kill Chico Mendes and him. A notorious car thief and drug smuggler, Garimpeiro is the kid brother of Darli and Alvarino Alves, and is believed to be a member of the Public Safety department's death squad. Apparently the caller had reservations about knocking off a man of God. "You'd better watch out or you won't get through '89," he warned.

I wondered whom I could trust. Not the police, clearly.

I asked a young girl cutting through the churchyard where I might find Dom Moacyr, but she quickly broke into a run. A woman standing nearby shrugged and explained, "She doesn't want to get involved," then suggested I try the rectory, now the headquarters of the local chapter of the Pastoral Commission for the Land (the C.P.T.). The commission was created by the church in 1975 to rectify Brazil's landowning pattern, which is one of the most regressive in Latin America: 1 percent of the population owns 46 percent of the arable land, while there are 12 million landless peasants. I knocked on the door, but no one came. Remembering that in 1985 Padre Jósimo Tavares was shot in the back while climbing the steps of the C.P.T. in Imperatriz, a city on the eastern edge of Amazonia, I tried the door, but it was locked. Then I began to pound on it. At last it was opened by a bearded man with long hair, dressed in white, his neck and wrists dripping with Indian beads and animal charms. He looked like one of the apostles, but turned out to be Xapuri's priest, Luis Ceppi. "Come in," he said, and explained in Portuguese with an Italian accent, "Dom Moacyr went to visit his mother in the South. He hasn't seen her since his father died, and she was very worried about him after she read in the paper about his being *anunciado*."

We sat in a meeting room and Padre Luis, lighting up a cigarillo, told me how he had come to Brazil from Milan to practice the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Boff brothers. "The living faith must be linked to the reality of man," he explained, "and the reality of man in Brazil, in both the country and the city, is that most of the people are wretchedly deprived and exploited." In 1984 he met Chico. What was he like? I asked. "He wasn't a great speechmaker; he was just very clear and firm about what he believed in, and he was a born negotiator. He forged an alliance between the tappers and the Indians, for instance, who had been fighting each other for years—the Alliance of the People of the Forest. Nobody else could have done that."

The Tribunal of Justice was just down the road. I went up its steps and through its Greek columns to the office of the president, Eva Evangelista. On the third of January the phone had rung at Evangelista's home. She was working late, and her daughter answered it. A man's voice said, "Tell your mother not to go to the tribunal tomorrow, because when she walks up the steps her head will roll down them just as Chico Mendes's did." Her daughter was taken to the hospital and treated for nervous collapse, but Evangelista, the first female judge in Acre and a granddaughter of tappers, was not intimidated. "It wasn't a simple *pistoleiro* who killed Chico Mendes," she told reporters the next day. "There are more people behind this who have to be investigated. I'm convinced there is an organized-crime syndicate behind Chico's murder and the threats to the bishop and myself." But of the twelve prosecutors in Acre, half were on vacation and only one was working in the interior. It was Evangelista's unprecedented appointment of a

special prosecutor and a special judge to make sure justice was done in the Chico Mendes case that led to her *anúncio*.

Evangelista is a tiny woman who looks like the actress Elizabeth Ashley and has the same throaty voice and gutsy manner. She got up to greet me in front of a huge desk with a Bible open on a stand and the Brazilian flag in the background, and then we talked about the *anúncio*. In a few days twelve tribunal presidents were coming from all over the country to demonstrate their solidarity with her, she said. "I have four children and a loving husband, but I also have a job to do. We have to discover the authors not only of this murder but of all the murders related to problems with the big landowners. I believe very much in signs from God, and I think Chico died to usher in a new era of justice, to make us think about these problems and act." She and her distraught husband escorted me to the steps of the tribunal and, with nervous glances at the street below, went quickly back inside.

I took a cab to the offices of the *Gazeta*. The lead story in that morning's paper was that Darli had come out of the forest, barefoot and armed with a .38, and had surrendered to the police. Chiquinha, the youngest of the four women he had installed on his ranch, had confessed that he was hiding on another of his properties, the Fazenda Mineira, and they had sent his seventeen-year-old son, Darlizinho, into the forest to tell him that he might as well give up. The life-style of the ménage on the ranch was getting a lot of play in the *Gazeta*. "You can't imagine what it's like with Darli in bed," one of his harem, Natalina, raved to a reporter. "He's like a wild bull." She attributed his stamina to an aphrodisiac whose complicated recipe—the eggs of a certain bird prepared with numerous herbs—the *Gazeta* promised to reveal in its next edition, and did.

The editor of the paper, Silvio Martinello, a salt-and-pepper-bearded man of about forty, had his feet up on his desk and was listening to the tape of an interview with Darli in jail. "What I don't understand is why they didn't go in and get Alvarino and the Mineirinhos," he complained. "They had dogs. But I guess we shouldn't expect too much from our local police. Considering Acre's history of impunity, this arrest is impressive."

Darli had denied any involvement and claimed that his son had murdered Chico entirely on his own initiative. But the police were saying that he was the *mandante*, and still others claimed that the big ranchers were ultimately responsible. What's his connection with the U.D.R.? I asked Martinello. "Close," he replied. "We know from Darli's photo album that João Branco, the local president of the U.D.R., was at his ranch for a barbecue." And Gaston Mota, an arms smuggler who was Darli's partner and helped him massacre the family of rubber tappers in 1977, purportedly heads up the U.D.R.'s "executive committee" in Acre, which decides who has to go. Mota was picked up immediately after Chico's murder, but released, lamentably, twenty-four hours later for lack of evidence—perhaps with the collusion of friends in the police.

The detective who was conducting the inquest and a gaggle of Brazilian paparazzi were in the hotel watching *Rocky III*.

"The U.D.R. owns the other newspaper in town, the *Jornal do Rio Branco*," Martinello told me. "And a few days before Chico was murdered there was a strange announcement, a kind of oblique *anúncio* in the *Jornal* that said a two-hundred-megaton bomb is about to explode in Acre that will have international repercussions. And their reporters were on the scene half an hour after the murder. It takes three hours to get there from Rio Branco, so they must have been tipped off."

The U.D.R., which came into being in 1985 when Brazil's most recent agrarian-reform plan was going through its many drafts, is sort of like the John Birch Society or the Ku Klux Klan. Now there are 230,000 members with two hundred chapters in nineteen states. It's capable of marshaling 40,000 people to march on Brasília. It's run by the rural oligarchy, the two thousand who own 96 million head of cattle and are the force behind Amazonia's incredibly distorted development policies, and the beneficiaries of the billions of dollars of government incentives. In fact, the U.D.R. has succeeded in its goal of sabotaging the land-reform program. Only 5 percent of the land targeted for appropriation actually changed hands before the program ground to a halt. It appeals to the autocratic, macho part of the Brazilian psyche: you are the master of your land and nobody can tell you what you can do.

The president of the U.D.R. in Goiânia boasts that the organization has 70,000 arms, one for each man in it. Since the U.D.R. was founded, there has been a tremendous increase in rural violence: seven hundred killings in the last four years as opposed to nine hundred during the previous twenty-one. The killings in Acre are nothing compared with what goes on to the east, in Pará, Goiás, Maranhão. In Goiânia, the capital of Goiás, there are agencies masquerading as real-estate or law offices where anyone can walk in and explain his problem to the agent, who keeps 60 percent of the fee, studies the routine and habits of the person to be killed, plans the hit, and contracts the *pistoleiro*. There is even a table of prices: a union leader costs $500 to $1,200; a town councilman or a lawyer $1,500; a priest $3,500 to $4,000; a judge, state deputy, or bishop twenty-five grand.

By the end of the 1970s, Acre had become, in the words of a reporter from the *Fôlha de São Paulo*, "a state in agony." Big banks and holding companies, consortia of investors, had bought up huge tracts of the forest and were starting to burn it off—the Banco Real picked up half a million acres, the Grupo Bradesco 750,000. The Caxinauá Indians were expelled from their traditional homeland after FUNAI, the agency in charge *(Continued on page 227)*

Murder in Brazil

(Continued from page 194) of protecting them, issued "negative certificates" saying they were not there so that the Companhia Novo Oeste could move in with bulldozers and chain saws. Twenty-five thousand acres were being cleared annually in the municipality of Xapuri alone.

By then 20,000 tappers had joined the union, and with Wilson Pinheiro dead, Chico was their leader. He was fighting alone, with no government or police protection, at great personal risk. But in 1981 he made an important new friend, the anthropologist Mary Allegretti, who would help propel him to the third and final phase of his short career, from union leader to internationally acclaimed environmentalist. Allegretti came to Acre to study the traditional rubber tappers near the Peru border. She was so shocked to find them living in semi-slavery, deeply indebted to bosses who advanced them food and equipment, that "I decided to do something about it besides write a thesis," she recalled.

Allegretti had the contacts and know-how to organize, in October 1985, a national conference of rubber tappers in Brasília. Here Chico and 129 *companheiros* from all over the Amazon were able to tell their problems for the first time to an audience of sympathetic anthropologists, policymakers, and environmentalists.

Among them was Steve Schwartzman, an anthropologist who had studied the Krenakore, an Amazonian tribe that was nearly destroyed by sudden contact with the modern world in the mid-seventies. Schwartzman was now in Washington, trying to get multilateral banks and congressional committees to stop financing the destruction of the Amazon, particularly Rondônia, where one of the most appalling environmental catastrophes of all time was taking place.

In the early eighties, the government, with the help of the World Bank, sponsored a *corrida*, a run on the virgin forest of Rondônia. Something had to be done with the small farmers in the South who were being displaced by the consolidation of large landholdings for capital-intensive agriculture (especially soybeans) to pay off the foreign debt. Within a few years 500,000 colonists had poured into Rondônia. Each family was given 100 to 150 acres of forest and set to work diligently clearing and burning. Satellite photos of the state revealed 170,000 fires; Rondônia was a rash of glowing dots. Clouds of smoke were rising 12,000 feet into the air and being whisked up to North America by a circulation pattern known as Hadley's Cell, which disperses airstreams from the equator. But in most of the cases the soil proved worthless and the colonists ended up abandoning their homesteads and trying somewhere else.

Environmental- and Indian-protection groups made such a stink about the criminal folly in Rondônia that the World Bank suspended disbursement of funds pending a review of the project. But the Inter-American Development Bank approved a loan to pave BR-364, the road from Porto Velho to Rio Branco. Steve Schwartzman, Mary Allegretti, and Chico knew that if this happened Acre would be overtaken by the tidal wave of colonists that had already wiped out Rondônia, and that would mean the end of the forest and the tappers.

Schwartzman's first impression of Chico at the Brasília conference was that he was "very modest and unassuming, not a real fireball. His charisma was in his convictions. Only after talking with him about his struggle did I realize what an incredibly courageous man he was and the importance of what he was doing. Here was a real grass-roots leader with an extremely organized local constituency fighting deforestation."

Chico had noticed that the Indians were better-protected than the tappers because they had reserves that were at least legally inviolable. But why couldn't the tappers have reserves, too, "extractive reserves"? The foreign environmentalist community was already experimenting with various agroforestry projects—some sixteen native latexes, fibers, and resins can be harvested sustainably from the Amazon forest—but the importance of Chico's scheme was that the infrastructure was already in place. The tappers were already in the forest, and they were Brazilian, as was the author of the plan. The government would like that—they couldn't complain about foreign intervention in Brazil's internal affairs. So the environmentalists needed Chico to save the forest, and Chico needed the environmentalists to save his *companheiros*. It was a perfect marriage.

In 1987 Chico was flown up to Miami to address a meeting of the directors of the Inter-American Development Bank, who were reconsidering the funding of the road. The American, British, and Scandinavian directors were very receptive to his presentation on extractive reserves; the Brazilian director didn't want to hear about it. Schwartzman presented a study he and others had made whose findings were very interesting: a family of tappers and Brazil-nut gatherers made $1,333 a year, while a family of farmers made only $800, and a family of ranchers only $710. Extractive use of the forest required no state financing and was indefinitely sustainable, and was more profitable per capita and per acre, even in the short run. Chico made another presentation in Washington, to members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, which decides whether or not to release funds to the multilateral banks. With Schwartzman translating, Chico went over well with them, too, kind of like Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett, the straight-shooting, homespun backwoodsman coming to the capital and telling what it was like on the frontier. The I.D.B., the World Bank, and the congressmen came around. In January 1988 the paving of BR-364 was virtually stopped. The World Bank has announced that the "most promising alternative" to destructive colonization and cattle ranching is the extractive reserve, and it is funding the development of five of them in Rondônia. Extractive reserves with a total of five million acres have now been laid out or are in the works.

A film crew had started following Chico around. The footage of his 1986 campaign for state delegate on the Workers Party ticket captures a rather short, fortyish man with wavy hair, a thick mustache, and a genial, humorous face, with at times an even slightly daft expression on it—the special Brazilian *esquisito* type of daftness. He seems, as Adrian Cowell, the film's director, described him to me, "a placid and comfortable character." He has a full-term potbelly and is getting fatter and fatter in spite of the long walks he takes in the forest, because every time he comes to a tapper's house he is invited for a meal and he has to eat it if he wants the man's vote; he tells Cowell that he is "campaigning with his stomach." Chico got three times more votes than any other candidate in his party, but the party got only 3 percent of the statewide vote, so he lost.

Mary Allegretti had her own reason for getting him as much exposure as she could. "We were always aware that he was in danger. My way of protecting him was to make him an international figure."

The big news in the Rio Branco *Gazeta* the morning after I arrived was that Chiquinha, Darli's youngest concubine, had apparently cut her own throat. Chiquinha had a history of depression, had swallowed detergent in an earlier suicide attempt, and had just the week before tried to kill Margarete, her main rival for

Darli's affections. She was crazy about him. "I suffered a lot to know I wasn't his only woman, but forgot everything once we were in bed," she had revealed in yesterday's paper. The "Sultan of Paraná," according to Chiquinha, had equipment that when limp was "seven matchboxes long. It looks like a donkey's."

Margarete said it was the police who made Chiquinha kill herself. They had said they were going to turn her over to the tappers unless she told them where Darli was, and they also got her terrified that "American bombs" were going to be dropped on the ranch if any of them helped the fugitives. After she revealed Darli's hiding place, she had a dream in which he told her, "You betrayed me. For this you should die," and she went outside early in the morning and severed her own jugular with a kitchen knife. "The woman's suicide means that he's a killer," said my driver, whose name was Getúlio. "Imagine: killing yourself out of fear of being killed. Imagine how scared of him she must have been."

Getúlio had been napping in his taxi on the square, and I had awakened him to negotiate a trip to the *colônia penal*, the jail where Darli and his two sons were being held. It was ten miles from town, past the university and an Afro-Catholic fundamentalist community called Alto Santo, whose members drink the hallucinogenic juice of the ayahuasca vine and claim to be able to see the hereafter and their previous incarnations and to read one another's minds. We drove behind a truck loaded with immense mahogany logs through a zone of sawmills that were ripping the forest trees into planks. The road became a soup of red mud, and the car began to handle like a motorboat, Getúlio frantically spinning the wheel from right to left. The *colônia penal* stood in about ten acres of swamp surrounded by a concrete wall with curls of barbed wire on top. Several military policemen were standing around at the gate. Security was supposedly beefed up after an anonymous caller threatened to free the Alveses, but Antônio Campos, the director, said there was no problem about seeing them. He led me down a roofed-over concrete walkway to a small building with barred windows in the middle of the swamp. A guard unlocked the front door and took us to a little man with thick glasses, gray sideburns, and a mustache, standing behind the bars of his cell. It was Darli. He didn't seem like a vicious killer or an indefatigable stud, but like a pathetic, broken old man. He was terribly thin. He had been hiding in the forest for three months and he looked it.

After Chico's *empate* there in May, the Seringal Cachoeira was designated an extractive reserve. It was an intolerable humiliation for Darli, and he vowed to kill Chico. But a lawyer hired by Mary Allegretti did a little research into the Alveses and found that Darli and Alvarino were wanted in Paraná. In September, warrants for the brothers were sent to Mauro Spósito in Rio Branco, where they sat, inexplicably, on his desk for two weeks (and for which Spósito was transferred to drug-control work in Mato Grosso). Somebody—possibly Spósito himself, possibly their brother Odilon, who was the Civil Police clerk in Xapuri, or possibly, as Darli claimed, their pharmacist brother-in-law back in Paraná—tipped the Alveses off about the warrants, giving them time to take to the woods.

The cell was pretty much what you would expect: a concrete bed with a thin mattress, a low concrete block for eating on and keeping things off the floor, a sink, moldy pinups plastered on the walls by previous visitors. Darli was sitting on the bed. He seemed genuinely depressed. I'm sorry to hear about Chiquinha, I said. His eyes filled with tears. "I'm in great suffering," he replied. "What's going to happen to our three children?" This was pretty effective, but I remembered that Silvio Martinello had said he was a consummate actor. "They say I'm a mean man, but it's a lie," he went on. "I'm a humble man. I don't know why my son committed this *desgraçeira*. He was always very rebellious. His mother used to beat him a lot, and several times he ran away from home." I asked if the U.D.R. had anything to do with all of this, and Darli said, "I think in all sincerity . . . [long pause] that the U.D.R. was not involved. My son has no involvement with this organization. He did it for his own reasons. He was always saying, 'Father, how can you let Chico Mendes say all those terrible things about you?' " Where's Alvarino? I asked. "I haven't seen him in a long time, not since I went into the forest. He said he was going on a trip. Maybe he did." I asked if he had ever grown marijuana on the ranch. "*Graças a Deus* I've never participated in anything like that. The only fault I have, my friend, is that I like women."

I took some pictures of him, then asked Campos if I could see his sons, Darci and Oloci. Oloci had been captured a week after Darci turned himself in. We walked past a dozen cells. One of them had a color TV, a hotplate—all the comforts. What did he do? I asked. He was caught on the bus from Xapuri with marijuana. The drug people take care of their own, I thought. Campos said 60 percent of the inmates were in for drug trafficking. Some were Bolivian.

Darli came with us, perhaps to make sure his sons didn't say something wrong. He shook their hands and sat with the two of them on the bed with his head down the whole time. Oloci was twenty-two. He seemed like a friendly, regular guy, but was considered by the police to be possibly the most dangerous member of the clan. He was accused of taking part in the murder of the Bolivians and of firing from a motorcycle into a demonstration of tappers at the local Forestry Service station last May and seriously wounding three boys. His right arm was in a cast. During the police chase to capture him he had been shot. Thirty policemen guarded the hospital where he was taken to remove the bullet.

Darci was completely stone-faced, although I managed to crack him up briefly by saying that his uncle Alvarino looked like Jesse James. The case against Darci is strong. Everything he said in his confession jibes with the findings of the Mengele forensic team; the shot was fired from exactly where he said he had stood and fired it—from behind a coconut tree. A sister-in-law of Jerdeir Pereira, moreover, had testified that he and Darci had returned to the Fazenda Paraná on the night of the killing and said, "The confusion in Xapuri is over. We killed Chico Mendes." Darci almost certainly acted on orders from his father, for people have testified that they heard Darli planning Chico's death. Darci is also accused of the murder of a man named José Santos after a quarrel in a bar in September.

As I was leaving, Darli asked me sweetly, "How long are you going to be here?" I didn't like that question at all. I told him I was headed right for the airport, flying back to Rio that very morning. But we didn't go to the airport. We drove to Xapuri, a hundred miles to the southwest. For the first two-thirds of the way, there was good pavement, and Getúlio drove like a maniac, pushing his new ethanol-fueled Chevette well over eighty. We sped past the vast empty ranches of absentee *paulistas*. Only a few token zebu steers were grazing in the desolate grassland. The forest had been pushed back to or beyond the horizon. Occasionally a black, fire-eaten column would still be

standing, like a grotesque obelisk commemorating the holocaust. It was probably one of the emergents, the tallest trees, which had risen above the forest canopy before spreading out their leaves. Something small and black, the size of a squirrel, scurried across the road right under the wheels, and it felt as if we had hit a slight bump. What was that? I asked Getúlio. He said it was a *soim*, a tamarin monkey. Tamarins are small, tremendously variable frugivorous clingers. Some species can be identified only by slight differences in the white around their mouths; others have long white manes and exaggerated mustaches. Damn! The only wild mammal I see on the whole trip and we run it over.

Getúlio was born on a *colocação*, a family rubber operation, and his brothers are still in the forest. He has an impressive grasp of the greater web of intrigue and corruption surrounding Chico's murder, and sound arguments for why the investigation will be incapable of dealing with it.

At a junction with a road that comes directly from Bolivia we are pulled over by several federal policemen in snappy blue vests who are checking for contraband—French whiskey, electric appliances, televisions, blasters, cocaine, and marijuana. The big high in Acre, Getúlio has been telling me, is *mescla*, the residue of the cocaine process, mixed with grass and smoked. I explain to the police that I am a *pesquisador*, a researcher, a wonderfully vague and respected position in Brazil, and they wave us right on.

The pavement ends and once again we plunge into the mud. Getúlio deftly straddling deep ruts that we would never get out of. Big trucks loaded with sacks of Brazil nuts lumber past. Another roadblock. The police tell us the shortcut to Xapuri is too muddy and send us the long way around. After a couple of miles we meet another policeman, in a different uniform—all blue—standing in the road, one of the local military police. What's going on here? I ask Getúlio. This is the Fazenda Florestal, Alvarino's ranch. It's a small spread, only five hundred acres. Alvarino hasn't been as successful as Darli. A sweet-looking old man, barefoot in the mud, with white hair and stubble, comes to the window and introduces himself. It's Sebastião Alves da Silva, the octogenarian patriarch of the clan of murderers. "I'm Mineiro, from Minas Gerais," he says proudly. "I eat gold." (A reference to all the gold that has come out of the state of "General Mines.") And I say before I can catch myself, like a New York smartass, "So what do you shit?" Fortunately, Sebastião thinks that's a riot. So does the policeman; so do Alvarino's wife and teenage son, who have come from the house. A bloody riot. I tell Sebastião I saw Darli this morning. "How's he doing?" he asks. He's very thin and very upset over the death of Chiquinha. Well, we'd better be going, I say. I hope *tudo de certo*, that all goes right (a double entendre: what I really hope is that you all get put away for good). Sebastião says, "A leaf doesn't fall to the ground unless God wants it to." Later I find out that there is evidence linking Sebastião to eighty murders in Paraná back in the fifties.

A truck pulls up and its driver tells us we'll never get through to Xapuri this way, so we turn around and head back. The next ranch is unguarded. What's to stop the fugitives from dropping in for a beer and a bite to eat? I ask Getúlio. "Hell, what's to stop them from dropping in at the Fazenda Florestal?" he says. "The policeman is an old friend of the family." We turn onto the shortcut, and soon after passing a deeply mired Federal Police paddy wagon—part of the farcical dragnet for Alvarino and the Mineirinhos—we get stuck ourselves. Darkness falls. Insects and frogs start up a deafening samba as I push and push, frantically rocking the car, until the wheels finally engage and we are out and on our way again. An hour later the lights of Xapuri appear in the distance. We drive down the main street, lined with neat modern houses, shiny new pickups under carports, color TVs in the living rooms—not at all what I expected, not like any other Amazon town I've seen before. There's money here, I observe to Getúlio. What is it? Drugs? "No, it's a little more complicated," he says. The ranchers here also have ranches in Bolivia. They take their cattle over the border, then they go to Brasília and tell the Banco Central they want to import some steers, and the bank gives them a form that allows them to buy dollars at the official rate. Once they get the dollars, they sell them at the "parallel" (i.e., black market) rate, and pocket the difference—almost a 100 percent profit. Then they bring the steers back to Brazil, and pretend that they've bought them. That's why there are so many nice houses on this street.

Xapuri is the sort of place—three thousand souls in town, another seventeen or so in the surrounding countryside—that once you've walked around it three or four times you get the idea. *Tranquilo*, I say to Getúlio. "*Parece*," he says. It seems that way. We pull into the square, which is dominated by a statue of José Plácido de Castro, who led tappers, poets, and journalists in the Grand Revolution of 1903, which delivered Acre from Bolivia to Brazil. Three years later de Castro was ambushed while riding through his rubber grove. His last words were "So many glorious occasions to die and these *cavalheiros* shoot me in the back." There was a statue of Saint Sebastian, Xapuri's patron saint, stuck with arrows in a small park along the river, beside the dry-goods stores of the Syrians. It was a town of martyrs. I wondered how long it would be before there was a statue of Chico, the eco-martyr. Probably not for a while.

We got to the Hotel Veneza, a family pension, run by several generations of women, just before the evening deluge cut loose. The rain acted like a curfew. Everyone was glued to the television,

Rocky III. The audience included the detective who was conducting the inquest and a gaggle of Brazilian paparazzi waiting for the fugitives to be caught. They were city types from the South, completely out of their element. One was a financial reporter—everybody else in the newsroom had been off for Christmas when news of the murder came in over the wires. Another, in safari dress, was doing a thought piece on "the universe of Chico Mendes" during lulls in the action, but had no intention of entering the forest. "I hear there are six different sizes of mosquito," she said. "There's no way you're getting me in there." Behind the hotel a pack of black vultures brooded in the palm trees and paced the backyard, as if they, too, were on some kind of vigil.

In the morning I visited Chico's house, a simple shack with blue-painted plank siding and a red tile roof, no more than fifty yards from the Civil Police Station down one street and no more than a hundred yards from the Military Police Station down another. As I opened the gate to the yard a young woman came to the front window—Ilza, Chico's wife. She had a good deal of Indian blood and looked almost Polynesian, like a Gauguin. The lead story in that morning's *Gazeta* told how she had gone to a clinic in a nearby town the day before to have her appendix checked. The doctor, a Bolivian linked to the ranchers, had sent away his other patients and had then tried to rape her.

Ilza showed me into the front room, where her brother Raimundo, a cousin, an Indian tapper who was helping keep an eye on the place, and her two children, Elenira, four, and two-year-old Sandino, were watching television. On a shelf next to the TV there was a display of Chico's plane ticket to New York, his passport, his medal from the Better World Society "for your leadership in defending Brazilian Amazonia from deforestation and unsustainable commercial development," the framed testament inducting him into the United Nations' Global 500 roll for "outstanding practical achievements in the protection and improvement of the environment," and his key to the city of Rio de Janeiro. These treasures, Ilza explained, were to be the beginnings of the Chico Mendes Museum.

Ilza took me into the kitchen, where we could talk without being disturbed. I asked about Chico's early life. (He had a previous wife, who bore him a daughter; they live in Rio Branco.) "I don't know much, because we never had time to talk about the past. He was so busy. He worked for my father, splitting the milk he bled from my father's trees fifty-fifty. So he knew me from the moment I was born, but it wasn't until 1979, when I was fifteen, that we became lovers. Three years later we married. He was such a sweet man. I will remember most his love of the children. Fifteen days after the wedding he left, and after that in the six years we were married we never had more than eight days together. So we were always on honeymoon. It never became dull routine. There was always that immense love."

When Ilza went next door to take a phone call, I got Raimundo to lead me through the incredibly dense tangle between the backyard and the river to the flattened place, now strewn with white blossoms from a tree above, where the killers had waited. "They waited here twenty or thirty days," Raimundo told me. "We know that because the cans they ate from were full of mold, and the sugarcane they cut in the neighbor's yard was already rotten. It wasn't always the same two. They waited in shifts, maybe Darci and Jerdeir one night, maybe Oloci and one of the other Mineirinhos the next, or Luis Garimpeiro and Zezão." Zezão was another *pistoleiro* in Darli's entourage who in a few days would be found dead on the side of the road, shot either by Chico's brother, who was an agent of the local military police, or by the ranchers themselves to keep him from telling what he knew—a crime known in Brazil as "burning the archive."

Three days before Christmas, Chico came home after a trip to the town of Sena Madureira, way back in the forest, where he had brought five hundred more tappers into the union's fold. He played dominoes with his guards and then went in for supper. The family was watching a television soap opera called *Anything Goes*, about the corruption and decadence of the rich in Rio. All Brazil was waiting to find out who would kill the main character, unscrupulous Odete Roitman, in the last episode, which was to run on January 6. The sponsor had offered a big cash prize to whoever guessed it first. (The murder of Odete Roitman got more attention than Chico's death. There was even speculation that they were both killed by the same person. In a country where tens of millions of minds are being suborned, perverted, and zombified by television even before they attain literacy, the distinction between fact and fiction isn't always clear.)

Chico wasn't interested in *Anything Goes*, and throwing a towel over his shoulder, he went to take a shower. The shower was in an outbuilding in the backyard. He had opened the kitchen door about two-thirds of the way and was about to step outside when a blast from a long-barreled twenty-gauge shotgun caught him on the right side of his chest and shoulder, riddling the towel with buckshot holes. Chico staggered back into the kitchen, slumped onto the table, reeled into the bedroom, and collapsed on the floor. As soon as they heard the shot, the guards bolted out the front door and ran for their lives.

A few days after I left Acre, a delegation of American congressmen led by Senator Tim Wirth of Colorado stopped briefly in Rio Branco to demonstrate solidarity with the tappers and endorse the idea of extractive reserves. The main purpose of the trip was to view the devastation and discuss with President Sarney the possibility of canceling some of Brazil's debt in return for protecting what is left of the Amazon. Brazil is sensitive about foreign interference, and Sarney said he didn't want to see the Amazon become a "green Persian Gulf," although a few weeks later he seemed to be more open to the idea of a debt-for-nature swap. It would make everybody happy except the banks, and they aren't going to get their money anyway. But this proposal will probably be too late for Acre. The Japanese, who have no environmental scruples, have just agreed to finance the paving of BR-364 and to continue the road all the way to Peru. This will connect Acre with Lima, whose port on the Pacific is less than a thousand miles away, and will enable the Japanese, the world's leading purchasers of tropical hardwoods, to bleed western Amazonia dry of its timber, Brazil nuts, fish, and whatever else they can get their hands on. It will also make Acre vulnerable to all kinds of crazy new ranching and colonization schemes.

The Brazilian journalists stayed holed up at the Veneza for several weeks, waiting for Alvarino and the Mineirinhos to be caught. But the prospect of that happening was growing dimmer and dimmer. The four men could survive in the forest for a long time, if they were in there at all. The Federal Police were becoming demoralized. Five of their vehicles had been damaged during the manhunt, one man had broken his arm, and several others were *hors de combat* with gastrointestinal ailments. When the police pulled out, the journalists would also pull out, and that

Murder in Brazil

would leave no one to protect Chico's *companheiros*. Already there were signs that the ranchers were just biding their time. Eva Evangelista had been *anunciada* again, and a *tocaia*, an ambush blind like the one behind Chico's house, had been discovered in a thicket near Padre Luis's rectory. One evening Gumercindo Rodriguez, an adviser for the union, picked up the office phone to make a call. The lines were crossed—a frequent problem—and he heard two men talking: "We got Mendes," one said. "Three to go." The three most likely targets are Gumercindo, Raimundo de Barros, Chico's first cousin and political heir, and Julio Barbosa, the new president of the Xapuri local. If they are killed, their deaths won't make the headlines Chico's did. They'll just be three more murders in the backlands. □