

Matias F. Travieso-Diaz
4110 Faith Ct.
Alexandria, VA 22311
(703) 472-6463
mtravies@gmail.com

998 words

Whistles in the Forest

by Matias Travieso-Diaz

Bigfoot exists, along with Nessie and the Jersey Devil. Their formal discovery will happen tomorrow, or next week at the latest, and won't you feel silly when they are?
Thomm Quackenbush, Holidays with Bigfoot

His small frame and the green scales that covered his body blended with the foliage of the tall trees; even his flaming orange hair would pass for a clump of bright flowers. It was good camouflage, and this was fine by him, for he enjoyed being left alone, invisible to the humans.

Sure, sometimes there were sightings. On occasion, a woman washing clothes on the river bank would catch a glimpse of him as he moved swiftly to rescue an animal caught in a snare or a bird about to be devoured by a caiman. When that happened, he would flee rapidly, leaving confusing prints on the muck, for his feet were set backwards.

“It was a *curupira!*,” the woman would shout excitedly to others in her Tupi language.

But, for the most part, he and humans did not interact and he was able to carry out his mission of protecting the animals and trees that inhabit the jungles of the mightiest of all rivers.

Things changed when a different sort of humans, pale skinned and hairy, arrived in the jungle. They carried metal rods that spewed thunder and lightning and went on to kill or enslave the Tupis. From time to time, he would observe the newcomers' murderous actions; they disgusted him, but they did not cause concern, as human affairs are unimportant.

But more pallid humans kept arriving, bringing darker humans as their thralls. The masters and their slaves felled trees and burned wide swaths of jungle to clear the land and make room for their plantings to grow and their strange animals to roam. Forests started disappearing and, with no trees to release their moisture into the passing clouds, rain became scarcer, causing more plants – and the animals who subsisted on them – to perish.

He did all he could to oppose these destructive men. He was not a violent creature, and limited himself to playing tricks against the invaders. His whistles could resemble the calls of birds or the noises of animals; hunters would follow these sounds and get lost in the woods. Loggers would run away when he imitated the growls of jaguars and other ferocious animals. He could also emit eerie human noises that scared the colonists.

Sadly, his efforts failed to impede the spoliation of the land. The virgin woods were assaulted by the human *marabunta*, even more destructive than the army ants they resembled. He grew afraid that the humans' appetite for destruction would extinguish millions of plants and animals and turn the jungle into an arid wasteland. He had to do something.

He inflated himself to a size that would resemble that of an adult human and walked into a settlement in broad daylight, taunting the inhabitants to capture him. At first, the villagers ran away, hiding inside their cocoons, the smell of their fear burning his nostrils. Finally, the bravest among them approached, armed with fire sticks and other weapons. As they gathered around him, he spoke. His words were in rudimentary Tupi, a language to which he had been exposed for many generations. None of the villagers understood Tupi, but as they continued to encircle him they fetched someone, a very old and wrinkled female that belonged to that nearly extinct

variety of human that had been around for as long as there had been human life in this jungle.

Their conversation, such as it was, went as follows:

[He]: “Do not fear me. I come in peace with an important message for you and your kind.”

[The woman]: “What are you?”

[He]: “I am the *curupira*. I am the guardian of the woods and the streams and all the plants and animals that populate this domain.”

[The woman]: “But you don’t exist. You are just a legend we use to keep our children from misbehaving.”

[He]: “I am real. I have come to tell you and your kind that you must cease what you are doing. You are killing this forest and leaving behind a wasteland. You are blindly causing innocent animals and plants to die, fertile soils to turn to sand, rivers and streams to dry out. If you continue, the young among you will grow into misery and poverty. I command you to stop.”

[The woman]: “I am only one of the few survivors of what was once a large and powerful tribe. These people killed us off, as they are killing the land. I can convey your message, but they won’t believe the truth of my words. Even if they believe me, they won’t do anything about it. Their hearts have turned to stone, and they don’t care what they do to others or themselves as long as their desires are satisfied. Yet, your words and mine are being recorded. I hope against hope they will listen.”

[He]: “I do, too. And now I must go.”

Then, the *curupira* sought to break through the knot of his would-be captors and disappear into the jungle, but he could not outrun the firing sticks. Four bullets pierced through

the cryptid's scale-covered skin. He halted, ran his hands over the holes where the shots had entered, took one last ungainly step, and fell to the ground.

His pursuers approached the *curupira*'s body, which still convulsed but finally stopped writhing altogether. One of the leaders among the villagers turned the corpse over with his boot: the protector of the wild's open eyes stared blindly at the vast canopy of the forest. The leader gave one last casual kick at the cadaver, as the rest of the villagers crowded around it.

"What was that?" asked someone.

"Who cares?" replied the leader. Then: "We need to get moving. This section needs to be cleared by the end of the week."

There was the shuffling of dozens of feet. Later, except for the cries of an old Indian woman, the forest became silent. But soon would be reawakened by another creature that would continue the fight against the invaders.

END