



Chapter Four

The death squads moved in groups of three up the river. When the outsiders first began their raids they could motor right up to the villages and moor at the village fishing piers.

But after several dozen riverside villages near Marajo Island were torched and the inhabitants butchered or enslaved, word of the death squads spread upriver.

Those directly on the Amazon burned their piers. They smashed charred supporting columns and threw vines and vegetation on the shore to disguise the areas. Those villages inland, buried in the jungle, disguised old pathways to the village and set traps for the outsiders. In a few months the verdant jungle had grown over the old landings and along with the abandoned inland trails they were all a uniform green.

Old GRUMEC men still knew the general location of the villages, but they lost the advantage of surprise. The villagers would lie in wait with poison darts and arrows. The raiders knew

this and would level whole sections of the jungle with automatic weapons before venturing forward.

The villagers knew that each of the thirty foot riverboats held ten heavily armed men, most of whom had served in either the Brazilian Armed Forces or GRUMEC. There was a thirty caliber machine gun mounted on the prow of each boat. The outsiders had grenades, gasoline, and dynamite; while the natives had abandoned modern weapons and reverted to darts, arrows, and spears.

It was never a close contest. The raiders would go ashore in groups of three while one outsider would stay to guard the boat. Most villages were about hundred natives at most. The gunmen would go straight toward the central village clearing and gun down all the remaining men of each tribe with automatic weapons. The slaughter was usually over in less than ten minutes.

Then there would be an hour or two of blood-curdling screams as the outsiders raped and murdered the women and children. Often when the raiders found young natives, they would claim them and then take them prisoner, to be kept in their private harem of slaves.

Today would be an easy day. The gunmen had reliable information from a villager, one that had abandoned the jungle lifestyle and begged to be included in Sylvio's Marajo kingdom, that all the males had left the village for a regional council meeting. There would only be women; children, and a few old men to be disposed of.

They were about twenty miles upriver from Porto de Moz, at the southwest corner of Marajo, when the lead boat swung in toward a natural bay in the river. The pilot of the lead boat killed his engine and pointed toward the jumble of vegetation on the shore.

"This is it," said Paulo, who had been one of GRUMEC's best at dealing with indigenous tribes. "There's a trail on the other side of this pile of brush."

They were floating in about three feet of water and were only about ten feet from the ragged shore. As they got closer to the

shore they could see that much of the shoreline vegetation was loose and dead. The first team of three hopped out of the lead boat and waded ashore.

They kicked aside the bushes and found the old village trail to the dock in seconds. Paulo whistled at the following boats and pointed towards the woods above and below the trail to the village.

All three boats emptied except for the pilots. Nine men stepped into the jungle to the North of the village trail and nine men took to the jungle south of the village. The three teams of three from the lead boat sprinted up the overgrown path to the village while their colleagues approached it from opposite sides.

The village wasn't expecting visitors and hadn't posted any guards. There were a few dozen naked women pounding roots and cutting fish in the central clearing of the village. It was small for an Arawak village, perhaps only twenty cabanas arranged in a circle with their openings all toward the central clearing.

A few groups of naked old men were repairing weapons and working on their body paint. They looked up quickly when the trios of outsiders came charging into the camp, just in time to see the muzzle flashes from the assault rifles as the raiders poured a steady hail of automatic fire into each of the small groups of old men. None of the village men had a chance to get to their feet.

The women screamed and threw rocks, knives, sticks, and anything they had at the outsiders who merely shrugged off the projectiles. Rocks and knives bounced off the raiders Kevlar vests as the Marajo men rushed the group of women and began throwing them to the ground.

One ancient woman had grabbed two teenage girls by their hands and dragged them from the clearing when the outsiders breached the village. She struggled with the terrified girls and had them to the tree line behind one of the cabanas before they were cut apart by bullets from behind.

A thick, short outsider with markings from the Wauja tribe in the Tumucumaque mountains was calling out orders to the groups of outsiders. Once again they broke into thirds as the commander,

Carlos, had nine men, including himself, keep the women surrounded and under control, nine men were to go through the cabanas and see what type of food they could find, and the remaining nine men were to spread out around the perimeter of the village and look for stragglers.

There were no animal sounds in the jungle. They had all taken refuge when the gunfire began. The only sounds around the village were the wails and screams of the women before they were bludgeoned for making noise, and the laughs of the Marajo Island men.

For the first ten minutes there was the occasional burst of automatic fire around the perimeter of the village as the outsiders discovered an old man or a young child hiding in the rainforest. Then there was only the sound of the men laughing as they drew lots for the captured women and sliced the throats of the children.

Tulak was a small man. He had gone through his tribal ritual the month before, so even though he was only twelve years old he was a man.

When the raiders hit the village Tulak was fishing in a stream to the north of the village. He'd heard the automatic weapons and rushed home, fish spear in hand. The battle for the village was long over when he got there. The women were either dead, or packed into groups of three for the outsiders. The other children and the old men were all dead and lying on the ground in small groups.

Tulak lay down quietly beneath some shadowy ferns a short distance from the village. He could hear the raiders patrolling the perimeter of the village looking for survivors. They couldn't see him beneath the ferns as he lay silent in the dark while fierce fire ants bit his naked body. Although he could feel the pain, he no longer cared.

His father and brother had left two days before for an Arawak village farther upriver. The meeting they were attending was called by Mehinako, the charismatic leader of the Arawak tribes.

Mehinako was thin, seemingly chiseled out of stone, and a far cry from their previous leader, Setu. Their previous chief had

been fond of dressing in feathered robes and lived a gluttonous lifestyle. That style had been cut short by the fangs of a *Phoneutria fera*, the Brazilian Wandering Spider, one of the most lethal arachnids on earth.

The spider had been in a sheaf of bananas at a tribal gathering. There was no cure once bitten and Setu had spent three days with a painfully erect penis before dying from the full effect of the toxin.

The Arawak nation was in crisis and chose a successor immediately. Mehinako was a conservative choice, a proud throwback to their traditions, a warrior who stood naked, save for the penis sheath, and eschewed any other type of raiment.

He was a great warrior and the leader had called for the tribal gathering to formulate a unified defensive strategy. He had been taken by surprise when several exhausted Caribs had come through his village and told them stories of the raiders with the machines and weapons. There was no doubt that the outsiders were expanding and raiding farther upriver from Marajo Island, and that the Arawaks would soon be heavily involved.

Tulak lay silently as he saw the trios of outsiders take his sisters and the rest of the village women to the edges of the village. He knew what would happen next and he wanted to save his sisters from the Marajo men. Tulak squeezed his thin fish spear until his knuckles turned white.

The sisters had been taken to the edge of the jungle only about twenty yards from Tulak. Slowly he elbowed his way through the wet soil and the fire ants until he could just see the three raiders, his two sisters, and their neighbor through the leaves.

They were bending the bound women over a huge, fallen Kapok tree and tearing away any loincloths or feathers that they were wearing. Tulak didn't want to look, but he couldn't help himself. Slowly, he crept forward through the mud hoping to surprise at least one of the outsiders with his delicate fish spear.

There were screams and grunts in the air as the Marajo men all had their pants around their ankles and were leaning on the

women. The outsider's weapons were leaning against the tree and they didn't seem to be paying attention to anything but the women they were laying on.

Tulak crept faster. The outsiders were laughing and yelling taunts to their colleagues in the village as they raped the women. Tulak was just about to break from the brush and charge the raider that was on his younger sister when time seemed to stop.

There was a whizzing noise and a dull thud as if someone had pounded the mud with a club. The outsider that had been leaning over his younger sister suddenly leaned backwards and arched his back at a peculiar angle.

He sputtered something, blood dripping from his lips as he turned and faced Tulak. The arrow had transfixed the Marajo man, entering his back just below his left shoulder and stopping when the glistening red point of the arrow was six inches out the front chest of the raider.

Tulak heard a slight rustle to either side of him in the forest and he froze. The two men who had been lying on his older sister and his neighbor grabbed their weapons and turned toward Tulak.

Each man was hit in the neck with a feathered dart as he turned. They reached for the curare-dipped darts before firing and then were each hit in the stomach by a four foot long hunting arrow.

The jungle came alive around Tulak. A native covered in vines and branches rushed out of the bushes next to him and raced toward the women still stretched across the logs. He pulled an obsidian blade from the leather satchel he wore and sliced the cords the outsiders had used to bind the women's hands.

Four more foliage-covered warriors came from the bushes on either side of Tulak. They were carrying a few skins which they laid across the women's backs. The women were in shock, unable to fathom their quick change in fortune when a deep voice rang out.

"Damn it, Pablo! Say something so we know you're getting some."

The first native that had burst from the bushes, taller than the rest, was calling the shots. He was obviously Okanoan from his tattoos, and had a princely bearing. They were speaking a Toluca dialect softly, which Tulak could grasp most of.

“Take them to safety,” said the native who had cut the women’s bonds. There were more voices booming out from the direction of the village and a staccato burst of gunfire.

“Pablo...Enrique...answer damn it!”

Silence.

Then there were bursts of gunfire throughout the village as the outsiders shot all the rest of the women. Tulak watched in awe as the tall leader of the hunting party sent his companions away.

“Go, but give me half your arrows. Take these women and get them to where we left the dugouts. Wait until morning for me. I’ll take care of this.”

The four Okanoans took the three Arawak women and hustled them off into the brush away from the village. The leader of the hunting party seemed to melt into the undergrowth.

Tulak stayed where he was.

When the other teams of raiders found their colleagues dead on the ground they unleashed an orgy of automatic weapons fire into the surrounding brush. Tulak stayed prone, but heard the bullets flying overhead.

He sensed an almost imperceptible shift in the bushes near him. It was the Okanoan. Tulak didn’t breathe.

Slowly, the group of outsiders backed off toward the village. They took some money and weapons from their dead comrades and then left the bodies on the ground.

From that point on there was nothing to see for Tulak. He would wait face down under the thick fern with the fire ants fiercely gnawing on him until dark and then he would follow the trail left by the Okanoans to get his sister back.

Carlos, the leader of the outsiders, was standing in the center of the village clearing looking at the dead villagers strewn about.

He glared at his men and waved his AK around in the air for emphasis.

“Ok, bastards. Who missed these guys on the perimeter? You eight left can go circle this camp again and find who’s fucking with us.” Carlos turned to some young Caribs who were pushing baskets of gourds and sacks of manioc flour into a pile. “Is that all the food you found? A few bags of manioc flour and some gourds? Damn tribes.”

“They didn’t have much,” said one of the Caribs. “Maybe we’ve got to go inland or further upriver to get better food. It looks like they were getting ready to relocate and we caught them just in time.”

“Screw it,” said Carlos. “Just load up the flour and let’s get out of here.”

Just then there was a muffled scream on the opposite side of the village from Tulak. He looked up in time to see one of the perimeter guards come staggering into the village clearing with two of the long hunting arrows through his chest.

Carlos yelled “Go!” to his shocked companions and motioned for half of the men to head into the jungle behind their fallen guard. He told the Caribs to hurry up with the flour and he began to back away from the village clearing towards the river trail.

When Carlos turned and began heading for the river one of the Caribs came awkwardly out of the trail ahead of him. The Carib tried to speak, but with the long arrow sticking sideways through his throat he couldn’t get out any sounds before he fell over.

Carlos leveled his rifle and sprayed a wide arc of fire into the trail ahead of him, hitting a few of his own men carrying flour in the back, but mowing down a substantial amount of overgrowth.

Tulak was laying there wide-eyed, amazed at the stealth of the leader of the hunting party when the Okanoan grabbed him gently around his ankle.

The young Arawak turned slowly, but silently, and looked at the warrior who had just rescued his sisters. The Okanoan had elaborate whorls of tattoo and embedments on his cheeks and forehead. He wore a jaguar skin held together with a small gold chain underneath the branches and vines he was still covered with.

The Okanoan, Kakwa, raised his eyebrows and put his finger to his lips to silence Tulak. The young Arawak nodded and began crawling quietly away from the village side by side with Kakwa.

When they were several hundred yards from the village Kakwa motioned for Tulak to rise and the two began jogging down the ancient trail toward where they'd left their dugouts.

After a short run they were confronted by two of Kakwa's party who had concealed themselves by the sides of the trail a short ways from the canoes. The Okanoans smiled and clasped Kakwa on the shoulder while Tulak ran forward to the canoes.

There, standing naked except for the skins over their shoulders, were Tulak's two sisters and the girl next door. There was an Okanoan in each canoe and they were just about to help the women into the boats when Tulak ran up and hugged his younger sister.

“Thank God! Oh thank God!”

The sisters thought their brother had been killed but were overjoyed to see him muddy, alive, but well. They hugged quickly and then jumped into the dugouts at the behest of the Okanoans and pushed off from shore.

They paddled quickly for in the distance they could hear the awful sound of big Mercury outboards churning the dark and deadly river.