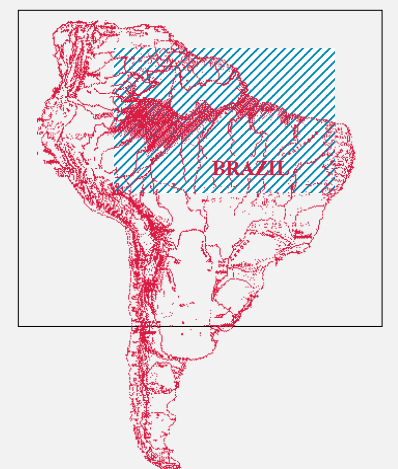

THE DREAM & THE DEAL

Here's the Dream: You leave your family, go to the gold mines, work like a dog and maybe in a year or two you make enough money to retire and never worry about money again. Here's the deal: You leave your family, go to the mine, work like a dog and return broke. Maybe your family is there waiting. Maybe not. It's a toss of the dice. You put everything on the mine and you either win or lose. Most lose.

— Elton Rohnelt, Entrepreneur & Owner of Goldamazon, a gold mining company, Manaus



There was a church in Gaviao. Two brothers thought there was gold under it, so they started digging. But the town folk told them to stop because they were afraid their church would fall down. Well, these two brothers promised that if it did fall, they'd rebuild it with the gold they were sure to find. So everyone said OK, go ahead and dig. Well, they dug until the church collapsed and in the end, instead of gold, they found a diamond. They say it was as big as a fist. So they went to Manaus or the big city wherever it was, and sold it. They made a lot of money, bought a truck, filled it with booze, fireworks and whores and went back to the town where they threw a party that lasted for days. After it was over, the booze was gone. The fireworks and the women were spent, and the only ones left standing were these two brothers. So they sat around the fire talking about all the fun they'd had the last few days and the conversation rolled around to the richest man in the valley.

"Well," said one brother, "who do you think is the richest man in the valley?"

"I heard say it was Fulano so-and-so down there in some-place-or-other. He has more money than you can shake a stick at."

"Is that so?" asked the other brother, and he stood up, pulled a wad of money out of his pocket and threw it in the fire. "That's how rich I think he is," he said with pride and sat down.

His brother, not to be outdone, said "Hell, I'm richer than you and him put together," and he threw all the money in his pockets into the fire.

Well, being brothers, they couldn't stop. So the first went over, picked up a big satchel full of money and threw it in the fire and burnt it. This went on and on until the next morning, and when the sun came up, they had nothing left. They burnt all their money, and the church never got rebuilt.

Both brothers were back in the mine that same morning working like dogs. Everyone was surprised.

"Why are you here?" they asked. "You have more money than anyone could ever have. Why are you working?"

The brothers were ashamed to say they had burnt up their money.

"Well," they said, "we sent most of it home to our families and we decided to stay here and look for more gold. We'd rather mine. We're miners."



I never met a gold miner with money.

— Padre Adolfo Rohl, known as Padre Moses
Missionary, Humaita'



I know a guy who struck it rich in the Serra Pelada. He went to Belem and bought one of those fancy Italian cars, a Maserati or something. He drove it up and down the Transamazonic Highway to show off his fortunes at the different gold mines in the region. It finally got stuck in one of those big holes in the road and sunk in the mud. So he left it there and went back to town to buy another one. That was less than two years ago. Today he drives a truck for a living.

— Victor Rogerio Cavalcante Silva,
General Manager of Sweet River
Mining Company, Marabá



The true hero of the Amazon is the gold miner. He's the one who has risked everything to take possession of the land.

— Elton Rohnelt,
Owner of Goldmazon Mining Company

Jose Altino and his pistoleiros got to Boa Vista first. He controlled the gold miners and the flow of gold out of the Surucucu'. But Elton didn't care. He wanted in on the game. So he sent me and five men up there, to Boa Vista. We had guns and we used them. There was a war, you know, between Elton's men and Jose Altino's pistoleiros.

Well, it got very expensive. I mean, it's hard to do business, mine gold, fly planes, keep men happy and make a profit when people are shooting at you. Elton and Jose spent all their time, money and men fighting. No one got anything done. No one could get any gold mined. So these two guys finally got together, shook hands and made a truce. No more shooting. We got to do business in Boa Vista and Jose Altino gave our pilots landing rights at Paapiu, Barra de Formiga, Feijao Queimada and all the other strips in the Surucucu'. Elton and Jose basically became mortal friends, as it were. Business went on as usual.

— Sr. Neves,
Second in Command
Goldmazon Mining Company



When I asked "Who died?" the man said "My brother." I must have looked embarrassed because he held out his hand and said, "That's OK. Death is more common here than life." Then he turned away to put his brother into the ground.



*The gold miner doesn't
know how to get rich.
He only knows how to
find gold.*

*— Cabeludo, a gold
miner on the Madeira River*



Gold destroys everything.

*— Edvaldo Campos, 'Liberal'
Produce Store Owner,
Itaituba*

*We have a saying in the Amazon: 'Don't be in a hurry.'
Another one is this: 'In the Amazon neither time or
distance means anything.'*

*— A gold miner preparing for a two month walk into the
Surucucu'.*

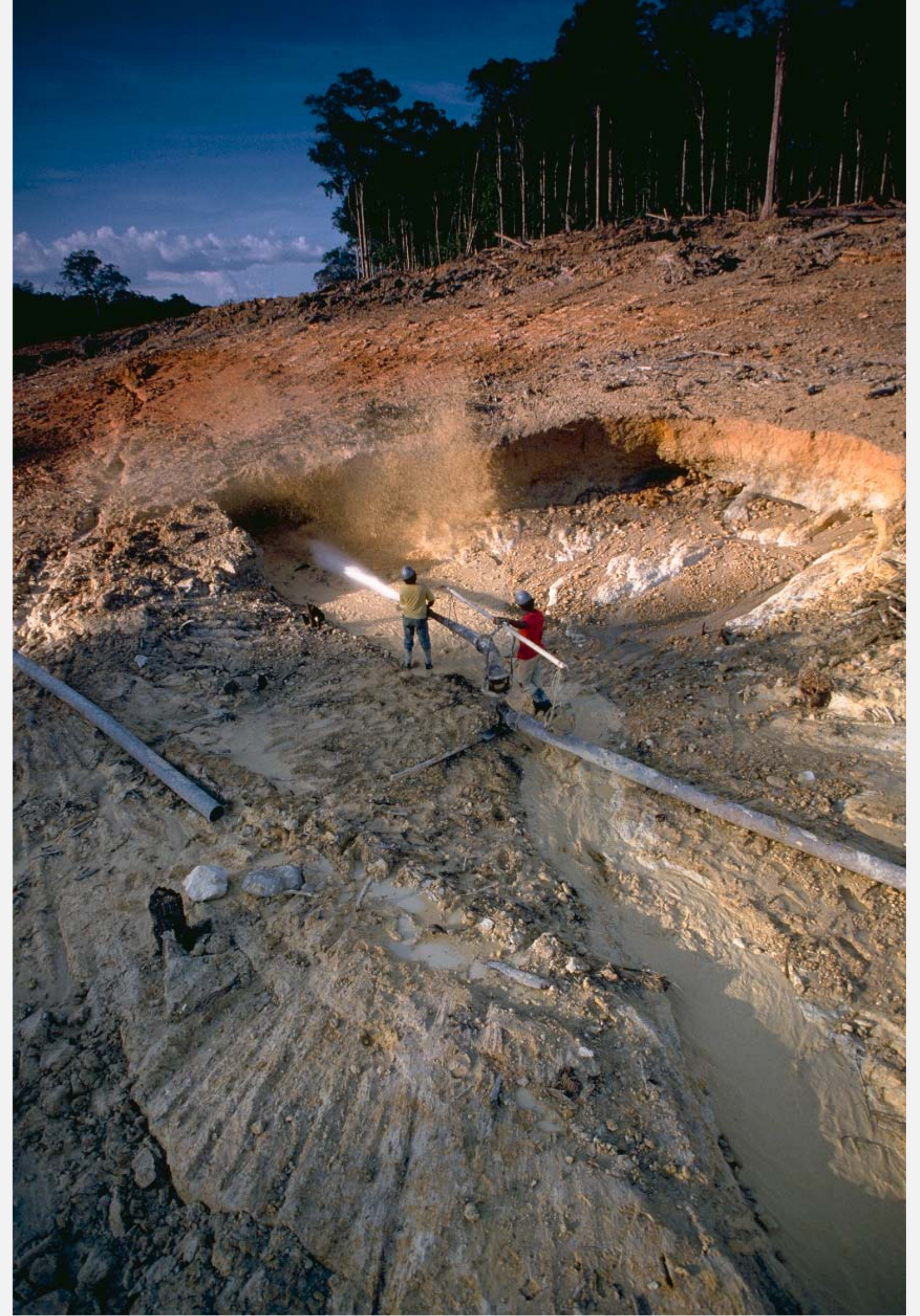


***B**etween the trees and the river, the river is better.*

*— Rogerio Abreu, Pilot,
describing how to crash a plane.
He is a survivor of nineteen crashes.*

***D**on't worry. It took Mother Nature a hundred million years to make gold. It'll only take her 100 years to make the trees again.*

*— Anonymous gold miner
working a water jet in the forest*



I crossed over to Bolivia with my brother, my brother-in-law and three other guys. We carried seven hundred pounds of gold mining equipment on our backs into the jungle somewhere south of Guajara-Mirim. Six days by foot. We made a pact with the Bolivian Army. If we gave the soldiers a ten percent cut in any gold we found, they'd leave us alone. As soon as we struck gold the Bolivians came with guns in the middle of the night and started shooting. I escaped, me and one of the other guys. I don't know if my brother made it out alive. The last thing I saw was him running into the jungle with nothing on.

I was lucky 'cause I got up to go to the bathroom and had my boots and pants on. So I ran. But it was dark and I fell into a damn palmeira and jammed over eighty spines into my left leg. My brother was sleeping when they attacked. That's when they came. That's when I escaped. I left everything I had back there. I have nothing now. My brother, I don't think he got out alive. Not from that jungle. Not naked. Not without boots.

I don't know what to do next. I got a wife and kid in the south. I haven't seen my kid in a long time. I called him today to wish him a happy birthday. He's sixteen. He told me he quit school today, being legal, and I got mad. He told me to mind my own business. He showed no respect. If I had any money I'd go home and whip some sense into him.

He's a good boy. He's just revolting like kids do. He wants to get ahead fast. He's like all the kids. They see those fancy things on the TV and they want them. So they drop out of school looking for quick money and they end up in the gutter.

I'm sick over it. I'm so upset. I've lost all my money, my equipment, maybe my brother and now my only son. I've lost his respect. I'm at the edge of despair over it. I even went to a church today. I wanted to find the old priest and scream or cry or something. Anything, just to get it off my chest. I don't want to go home and be a failure. I'm going back to the gold mines, but first I want to get drunk.

— Carlos Augusto Nogueira Tosta, 34,
gold miner from Sao Paulo





The only way in and out of the Surucucu' is by foot or by plane. It's cheaper to fly in. It's almost twice as much to fly out because they know it's the only way out so you pay dearly. Unless you're dead, or dying. Then they'll usually take you out for nothing. The pilots are generally greedy, but we're not bastards.

— Rogerio Abreu, Bush Pilot

Once a garimpeiro stole from another. He stole gold. When they found him they tied him up and dragged him up and down the Transamazonica. Then they cut him to pieces and hung his parts on sticks all up and down the road, to warn others of what happens to thieves. I know, because I saw it."

— Padre Mario
Salesian Missionary Priest, Humaita'





“The Virgin Mary visited me last night,” Elton said. “She brought a couple of young kids who were mining gold in the Surucucu’. They wanted to sell their claim for ten kilos of gold. I bought it for eight.”

Elton said the two kids were pulling out three hundred grams of gold a day but gave up because the tin ore was wrecking their sluice. Elton is the head of *Goldmazon*, one of the largest gold mining concerns in the Amazon. His men supply gold miners with equipment and transportation in and out of mines all over the Amazon.

“Actually, I stole it,” he said. “The kid and his partner, they went into the jungle by foot and walked for almost two months into the Surucucu’. That’s sure death. They should’ve died. But they were lucky and lived. Not only that, they found gold and tin. Gold mixed with tin. They didn’t want the tin, they wanted the gold. They’ve worked five months trying to extract the gold from the tin. They’ve dumped a fortune worth of ore into the river doing it, too.”

“*Deus me livre* — God help me,” he said and he pulled out a map of the Catrimani River Region in the Surucucu’. He pointed to the location of the mine.

“We’ll send the ore to Sao Paulo and have our men separate the tin from the gold,” he said. “The gold stays with us. The tin we sell. Now, all we have to do is put the word out and in a short time everyone will know that mine belongs to me and no one will dare set foot on it. It’ll cost them their lives and they know it.”

He picked up an old green Pepsi bottle filled with honey that Rogerio, his pilot, brought to him.



Pulling out the cork, he sniffed at the bottle and said, “Janaini. This is definitely made by the Janaini bee. They’re all over the place, but they’re harmless.”

He raised the bottle to his lips to drink, but hesitated.

“Look,” he said and held up the bottle of golden liquid. “A dead bee, stuck in his own honey. Just like those two kids, stuck in their own gold.”

He grinned, then swallowed thei it whole, honey and bee.

— *Diary entry, the author, Paapiu airstrip, the Surucucu’, Roraima*



The gold miners, they don't care. They don't care if death comes. You can see it in their eyes. Hell, not just the murders. There's forty of them a month. They've seen it since they were kids. They've lost half their families, brothers, sisters, to malaria, disease, murder. They've grown up with death. Death comes easy. It comes a lot easier than life.

*— Padre Adolfo Rohl,
Missionary, Humaitá'*