

The Jaguar: An Unexpected Encounter

by

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Nigel, my Amerindian guide, and I departed our camp a little after 2000 hours on November 2nd, 2021. We were the only pair that decided to venture out that night. Our purpose for traveling under the stars was to target ‘cats.’

Nevertheless, the cat we encountered was not the cat we are initially after. It was the one I knew I would eventually meet face-to-face. Sometimes you just know!

It has been a long time since I had that gut feeling and have been able to fully trust my intuition. After that fateful night, I will never immediately paint doubt on the unexplainable.

Nigel had moored up our boat against the bank near a catfish hole. We may have been anywhere from a quarter of a mile to a half from our lodge camp. The past few nights he would tell me that he spotted “Jaguar eyes.” It is not that Richard, my angling partner and I did not believe him, but our eyes are not trained like theirs. We do not see what they see!

These people see the rainforest in all its existence. They hear its voice, they smell its aroma, they feel its life force, and they are interconnected with every living and nonliving being that relies on it for survival. Their relationship with the rainforest is something that we “outsiders” would never understand.

We come from a world of “hustle and bustle,” always in a rush, and always glued to the digital for instant satisfaction. We often forget that pushing pause is an option.

When Nigel spotted her, I had my doubts that I would lay eyes on her. Nigel called to me “Stasia! Stasia!” He wanted me to get closer! It took my brain seconds to synchronize up with my senses. I could not believe my eyes! She was one of the most beautiful creatures I have ever seen.

Her immense size, her raw power, her distinct spots, her uniquely light pattern, her hypnotic eyes, and her calmness. She stood there unafraid of us and us unafraid of her. I should have feared for my life, but with her there nothing to be afraid of.

When my eyes locked with hers, a connection was formed between woman and beast. There will never be words to describe the rawness, as well as the wildness of that moment. I still do not think I am able to fully comprehend how lucky I was. It is so rare for any of us to ever find ourselves at the right place and at exactly the right time.

In our ignorance and our disconnectedness, we forget the spirituality of the natural world. Every time I have gone to church, I never came close as I did that night in the jungles of Guyana. Being in the presence of a Jaguar was the most spiritual moment of my life. These ‘Rainforest Gods’ watch our every move, they see and hear everything, and we never know that someone or something is watching.

I remember Nigel telling me that night how incredibly lucky I was to have had that experience. I am not sure how I was deemed worthy, nor chosen for that moment. I still

do not understand if I was meant to see her. Or had this all been down to luck? I may never know the answer.

Animal scientists spend their whole lives trying to catch a mere glimpse of these magnificent cats in the wild. Somehow, I found myself where so many dare to even dream.

One of the things that I still stick with me is where we saw her. We spotted her next to a mining sign. Oh, the irony!

Mining for gold still occurs in several areas of the Iworkrama Rainforest along the Essequibo River. The damage that has occurred over the centuries to the local communities and the environment that houses these beings cannot be repaired in an instant.

When I saw her where I did, it was as if the natural world was sending a message. The message is open to interpretation to the reader, but to me it was noticeably clear!

The time may come when she does not choose to drink from that stretch of the Essequibo, when she no longer shows herself to those that have been chosen, when she chooses to venture elsewhere, and when she chooses to never be seen again.

I don't want to imagine there may come a time where these magnificent 'Rainforest Gods' become tales of the past.

