

Before the beginning of Years, the worship of Man was simple: The All-Father was the Sun, the Giver of Light, Heat and Life.

The Mother of All was the earth, who brought forth Life from Her Depths of Ocean and Vastnesses of Land.

The Air, Nourisher of all that breathes, was the medium in which the Light of the Father conjoined with the Fertility of the Mother.

Reverence was duly paid to that which bore and nurtured the Race of Man. However, as Man learned the Use of Years, and many other diverse Things, he forgot the worship of his true Father and Mother and he came to worship himself, in his triumph and tragedy. He came to fear Death, the Doorway to Beyond. And finally, having forgotten All but the Trappings of his Heritage, Man came to the worship of the Acquisition of Things. And he did make a great Scourge of his Mother, the Earth, in his great Greed for Material Possession.

And it came to pass that once again did Father and Mother unite, this time to produce for their errant Child a much-needed Lesson.

MOTHER NATURE STRIKES BACK

I remember the day quite clearly, the day all the craziness started. Trudi and I were working on a Western Hemisphere Vegetation Survey using LandSat imagery. The USDA just has to know what's growing where so that we can be sure that we grow more than anybody else. Even if we do pay our farmers a lot of money not to grow anything. We still have to be on top, no matter what.

Anyway, we were reviewing the satellite photos of the Brazilian jungle taken at 5 minute intervals. One can never be too careful, perhaps the Jivaro Indians will get the jump on us in corn production. Trudi was scanning the images, reading off the relevant data and I was loading it into the USDA correlator. We'd been at it for three hours straight and we were both bored spitless.

"Specimen 141 shows natural vegetation and large burned areas," she droned, "no sign of developed farming."

"Specimen 142 shows natural vegetation, no sign of developed farming."

"Specimen 143 shows mostly natural vegetation, possibly one percent of image is crop production."

"Specimen 144 shows a large ring of concentric circles, no sign of developed farming."

"Specimen 145 shows natural vegetation, no sign..."

"Hey, hang on a minute," I blurted into her nasal drone, "Specimen 144 shows what?" I knew she had been out partying late last night and I figured she had seen a visible piece of her hangover. But we had to keep the record straight. If our boss, the duly-appointed Under-Secretary of American Crop Supremacy, Sam Fenwick, should read a report that we saw large concentric circles in the middle of the Brazilian jungle, we would surely be duly-unappointed from our present positions.

Trudi hit the ESCAPE button and said "Huh?", sitting up slowly and painfully from her semi-comatose daze.

"Trudi, girl, take three big slugs of coffee and back up to 144."