



Source: James Glanz, 'Televised confessions revolt, and rivet, Kurds', *New York Times in International Herald Tribune online*, 19/07/05

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The statues were strewn all over, some of them half buried and others simply covered in piles of leaves from the moulting canopy of mountain rainforest trees. There was an eeriness about its unemptiness. Pathways led off through tangles of bushes. Leafcutter ants tramped along in lines, carrying neatly-cut pieces of foliage, like choruses of exotic dancers. No bird sang, but in the distance, they could hear the reassuring low of dairy cows going to be milked. The silence of the forest doubled Juan Carlos's feeling of entrapment. Anie was feeling a contrary sense of liberation in this closed jungle. Xue sighed, 'This has been my dream to see the place where the sartañas lived.'

The heavy clouds began to rain down, tapping hard on the overhanging canopy but not penetrating it. The trio walked around the uneven grounds. Xue stopped and looked at the other two, smiling, 'Thank you for bringing me here!' Anie laughed, 'Who brought who?' The laugh broke Juan Carlos' uneasy feelings, 'It's raining. We should go back to the hostel.'

The carved faces were not actually faces but hideous demons, some with snake-like bodies, others with human bodies and enormous helmeted heads. Many times the size of the trio walking amongst them, stone gatekeepers looked into a distance that no longer existed. Priestesses, with backs bearing doorways going to some unknown destination, and fierce teeth pointing down to their hands which held their rounded breasts protectively. Stone elephants wearing elaborate headdresses lifted their long trunks to scream at the sky. 'Why elephants?' asked Anie, 'There have never been elephants here!' The other two looked and said nothing.

'My people say that the sartañas were here 10,000 years earlier than the Egyptians,' said Xue. As if it were proven fact, Anie nodded, 'That accounts for these then!' She pointed to the elongated men wearing lap dresses and head pieces remarkably like Egyptian pharaohs, their eyes closed in deep meditation. Piecing together Xue's riddles, Anie thought she understood. 'Maybe the sartañas were in many places, teaching many things to people?' They were walking down another muddy track to an opening where they could hear the running of water. Xue nodded, 'Sartañas disappeared before the Spaniard came, perhaps

from everywhere on this planet.'

Difficult as it was for Juan Carlos to fight his growing panic in this green prison, he was listening to the conversation, and he chortled sarcastically, 'You're not seriously talking about aliens, are you?' The sound of water was getting louder. Anie looked at him and whispered, 'It would be arrogant to dismiss ancient knowledge.' Juan Carlos shook his head incredulously, and crouched to put his hand in the water, 'You're both crazy!'

The rocks of the stream were pink, large and flat, as if one rock in molten movement. There were small pools within the rock where waters stilled. Juan Carlos shouted, 'Feel the water! It's incredible!' The other two bent down and put their hands in the hot stream. 'A thermal river,' said Anie, 'I have read about them.' Juan Carlos was hopping over the rocks to where the stream fell away into the depths of the jungle. He signaled to the others hurriedly, 'Come and see this!' The others leapt across and there beneath their feet were deeply-carved pools shaped like monkeys and tortoises, linked by carved rivulets shaped like snakes.

Xue took her shoes off and put her naked feet into the warmth of a tortoise pool. Juan Carlos remained standing, feeling more oppressed by the inexplicability of the site. 'This place is not somewhere I want to be at night,' he said indicating the setting of the sun, an urgency in his voice. The other two nodded and gathered their things. Together they walked hastily back to the gate where the elderly man who had let them in for a few centavos was sitting and smoking. His face was weathered like an aging potato. His eyes were deep like the Bijao people here, his nose hooked, his mouth reluctant to smile. Wrapped in a heavy ruana for the oncoming night and wearing a battered leather hat, he nodded at them, 'Come tomorrow. There is always more to see.'

They walked some miles back into the town of San Agustin along dirt roads, oddly dry after the spattering rain. Juan Carlos could breathe easier again, but Anie already longed to be back in the forest.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Miriam Taylor Gomez.*