



The Burning Season: The Murder of Chico Mendes and the Fight for the Amazon Rain Forest

Andrew Revkin

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"In the rain forests of the western Amazon," writes author Andrew Revkin, "the threat of violent death hangs in the air like mist after a tropical rain. It is simply a part of the ecosystem, just like the scorpions and snakes cached in the leafy canopy that floats over the forest floor like a seamless green circus tent."

Violent death came to Chico Mendes in the Amazon rain forest on December 22, 1988. A labor and environmental activist, Mendes was gunned down by powerful ranchers for organizing resistance to the wholesale burning of the forest. He was a target because he had convinced the government to take back land ranchers had stolen at gunpoint or through graft and then to transform it into "extractive reserves," set aside for the sustainable production of rubber, nuts, and other goods harvested from the living forest.

This was not just a local land battle on a remote frontier. Mendes had invented a kind of reverse globalization, creating alliances between his grassroots campaign and the global environmental movement. Some 500 similar killings had gone unprosecuted, but this case would be different. Under international pressure, for the first time Brazilian officials were forced to seek, capture, and try not only an Amazon gunman but the person who ordered the killing.

In this reissue of the environmental classic *The Burning Season*, with a new introduction by the author, Andrew Revkin artfully interweaves the moving story of Mendes's struggle with the broader natural and human history of the world's largest tropical rain forest. "It became clear," writes Revkin, acclaimed science reporter for *The New York Times*, "that the murder was a microcosm of the larger crime: the unbridled destruction of the last great reservoir of biological diversity on Earth." In his life and untimely death, Mendes forever altered the course of development in the Amazon, and he has since become a model for environmental campaigners everywhere.

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