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The Forest People

by Olivia Sprinkel

“The news spread quickly through the village. “The decise is coming”. The village downstream had heard its cries, sounding like a squirrel cuckoo. It had been heard passing houses going down the river, over the span of an hour. And now it was approaching our village. The decise is a particular type of spirit, a human-like figure about three feet high. I saw it when it arrived. I could tell that it was sad because it was looking for a place to live. I said that it was welcome to stay in our forest.”

I am listening to Randy Borman, the Cofan chief and shaman, one evening after dinner in the village camp.

He is speaking about how man is destroying the environment and the web of interconnections. The oil spill kills the algae, which in turn kills the minnows because they don't have anything to eat, and the birds which eat the fish then don't have food either. In the Cofan world view, when the forests are destroyed, we are not just destroying places where people and animals can live, but the home of the spirits of the forests as well. If the decise is not happy, they can wreak their own havoc.

We are unaware of the totality of what we are destroying when we cut down the forest. Randy speaks about the different layers of the forest, about how when we go into the forest we need to use our five senses, and then go beneath the feeling layer. “There are layers of the unseen, and all the different worlds are thinly layered on top of each other so it is possible to move between them.”

I think back to my night-time experience and how I had been able to see through to the world of the forest spirits and the underground network.