

COLORS 68: AMAZON

The Amazon rainforest, the earth's largest remaining tropical wilderness, is disappearing as fast as ever. Despite the cries of alarm that went off in the 1980s, it's losing a chunk of forest cover the size of Belgium every year. That leaves about 80 percent of forest still standing, but scientists believe that only 58 percent may still be left in 2020 and that within 50 years it could disappear entirely.

The Amazon's disappearance has long been a cause for concern. But who really cares about preserving the rainforest? Scientists no longer believe that the Amazon acts as the planet's lungs (the forest absorbs about as much oxygen as it produces), and the best the environmental group Greenpeace could come up with is that it acts as the "earth's air conditioner." A nice added feature in these times of global warming, not nearly as essential as lungs.

To get a sense of who cares about the Amazon and why we've decided to introduce you to some of the 17 million people who live there. Come and meet **Sebastião** who is waiting to receive rights over some land in far western Rondônia state where he fled after dealing drugs in São Paulo's *favelas*. Self-confessed diamond addict **Leônidas** who risks life and limb looking for diamonds in the Cinta Larga Indian reserve, once held a rock worth a cool million in his hands, only to turn it over to the chiefs of a tribe that practiced cannibalism until recently. Indigenous communities lobby for their rights along with their local representative **Armindo** a retired soldier. Downstream along the Rio Negro, **José** knows that he will have to leave his indigenous community if he wants to study in the city of São Gabriele da Cachoeira, where the local diocese is headed by Bishop **Don Song**, a Chinese-born priest who discovered in the jungle a land of religious freedom and who preaches with music and magic tricks. Five days by boat downstream near the city of Belém, **Pascoal** went to start a new life, which he did one night by falling in love. **Lili** tried to cure her broken heart by going to the "end of Brazil." She now seasons her food with love when there's nothing else to offer the guests at her inn. Almost blind **Arthur**, who first came to the region to tap rubber during World War II, now relies on his parrot Fofinha to identify bad guests.

Welcome to the wild, weird and wonderful world of the Amazon.

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