

Early one morning, the lookout cried “Land ho!”. Sailors scrambled up the rigging for a better look and indeed, land spread from one side of the horizon to the other. Not an island as the many they had encountered so far.

As the ship got closer, they could see a verdant jungle of tall trees and beaches of white sand. The captain had anchors lowered several hundred yards from the beach and called his landing party to the longboat. Mario was among the crew, favored by the captain for his agility at climbing trees to get coconuts and other fruits. Past the tide line were several canoes and nets drying on racks but no one in sight.

A small stream flowed from the jungle to the sea and the crew brought several empty casks to fill. Some men dug for clams and searched for crabs while Mario cut down coconuts from the trees.

After a time, the crew was alerted that men were approaching. Unlike other natives encountered so far, these men were armed with bows and their arrows already nocked. Coppery brown skins glistened with sweat and there were serious, determined looks on their faces.

The captain, a peaceful but cautious man, raised his empty hands in greeting. He smiled broadly while the crew made ready their muskets in case of trouble. Mario, now some ways up the beach, had come down from the trees to watch.

“Hola! Hola mi amigos! Como esta usted? We come from Spain in peace. Greetings from the King and Queen of Spain!” The other men did not smile. They yelled things back to the Spaniards. With threatening gestures, they made plain their desires that the strangers should return to their boat.

One of the armed crewmen, stiff with fear, put too much pressure on the trigger of his musket and it went off with a BANG! No one was hit, but in an instant several of the natives returned fire, the arrows finding their marks easily. Another crewmember fired his musket in haste, dropped it, and ran back to the long boat as it was pushed out to sea.

Three sailors lay in the sand, brought down by arrows while a hundred yards away, Mario stood frozen in his tracks. As the captain

and crew fled, Mario plunged into the jungle, catching the attention of the natives who pursued him into the thick undergrowth.

For a few moments the men heard the cracking and breaking of brush ahead of them and then the noises stopped. The small wiry men listened closely to the jungle. Only the buzzing of insects and chattering of birds broke the silence. Cautiously, the men made their way forward, wary of an ambush.

They only saw one stranger go in, but there may have been more. Once before had strangers come to the shores of the Jaguar People and were greeted warmly. Instead of kindness in return, several were taken away by force and others were hurt or killed trying to save their brothers. The last strangers also came in a very large canoe. The Jaguars were not going to be attacked again on their own land.

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Slowly, slowly they crept forward, arrows at the ready. Ears and eyes strained for any hint of danger. As they came into a clearing, a baby's wail cried out. "Whaaaa! Wa wa wa waaaah!"

The stranger lay in the clearing on his back, arms and legs flailing, his mouth open and contorted in a painful grimace. "Whaaaa! Wa wa waaaah!" The foreign man cried as like a two-season child.

When the stranger saw them, he brightened up. "Papa? Papa?" He crawled on hands and knees to the astounded men. The pale stranger's eyes were wet and red but now wore an enthusiastic smile as he held something in his hand. At the leader's feet, the stranger looked up and held out a sorry looking flower. "Papa? Papa? Ah, Papa!" Mario then grasped the leader's leg with both arms and happily babbled away.

Some of the men started laughing at the surprised look on the leader's face. When Mario heard the laughter, he looked up and gave his most winsome smile. He hugged the leg even closer and started kissing the hairless thigh in exaggerated appreciation. Now the men were convulsing with laughter.

Leader pushed Mario away in embarrassment and pulled the arrow back on its string, aimed directly at the center of Mario's chest. It was a challenge. The other men fell silent.

Mario's hands found two apple size fruit and, showing them plainly to the men, slowly stood up, tucked his shirt tightly into his trousers, pushed out his chest and placed the fruit inside. Forming his lips into a suggestive pout, Mario began to play the harlot.

He walked about with hands on hips, traipsing among the men, mussing one's hair, brushing his hands along another's shoulders and making exaggerated faces to show appreciation of their manly forms. A couple of the men got into the act, looking Mario up and down in a leering fashion and feeling his "breasts". The Leader's challenge was forgotten amidst the laughter.

With a flourish, Mario removed the fruit from his shirt, kissed them and tossed each one lightly to the men as a kind of reward. He bowed deeply to the leader who still had the arrow pointed at him.

Leader wore an amused look and removed the arrow from the bow. He did not completely trust the stranger, but at his men's insistence agreed to bring him back to the village. From there, they would decide what to do with him.

Two of the hunters broke from the group and headed back to the beach while another picked up the carcasses of earlier kills. He hefted the large, pig-like creature to one shoulder and four monkeys tied together over the other shoulder, dead eyes staring from black and white faces.

As a precaution, Leader tied a sturdy vine from Mario's wrist to that of the group's stoutest man, lest Mario try to get away. In his mind, Mario crossed himself three times and thanked Santa Maria and Baby Jesus for making him such a good fool. They picked up a trail and plunged into the forest.