



River of Eden

By Tara Janzen

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Romantic Suspense and Adventure on the Amazon River

"One of THE most breathtaking and phenomenal adventure tales to come along in years! [Tara Janzen] has created an instant adventure classic...get your hands on a copy of this book today!" -- Jill M. Smith RT Book Reviews

WINNER - Best Romantic Suspense 2002 RT

A LOST WORLD

In the heart of the rain forest lies a prize Dr. Annie Parrish is willing to risk her life for, a legendary orchid that will put her name in the history books - if she can find it. With her resources dwindling and time running out, only one man comes cheap enough and is skilled enough to take her deeper into the savage reaches of the Great Green Hell known as the Amazon.

A ROGUE SCIENTIST

William Sanchez Travers has macaw feathers tied in his hair, a week's worth of beard, and a shaman's crystal hanging around his neck, convincing Annie that even the wildest stories she's heard about him don't tell the tale. A Harvard-trained botanist, the once world-renowned professor lost his reputation – and some say his mind – when he vanished from his camp on the Rio Cauaburi and disappeared for a year in the forest. Now he's back, in a seedy waterfront bar with a beer in his hand and a mulatto woman doing the lambada on his lap – and against every ounce of common sense she has, Annie's about to make him an offer.

ONCE THEIR JOURNEY BEGINS, THERE'S NO TURNING BACK

The last thing Will needs is a woman whose secrets run as deep and dark as his own. A renegade in her own right, the legendary Amazon Annie is a magnet for trouble – and he's already got plenty. He's out to destroy a devil named Corisco Vargas, before the twisted army major can unleash his nightmarish forces on the whole of the Amazon. Trapped between a shaman's mystical visions and the violence of the real world, their journey quickly becomes one of desperate danger. But which force will rule their fate – justice, vengeance, or a power as potent and seductive as the Amazon itself?

RIVER OF EDEN originally published by Bantam Books 2002

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

It doesn't matter how weird the rumors are as to why defrocked, Harvard-trained ethnobotanist William Sanchez Travers has fallen from grace and into the mystical clutches of the Amazon rainforest. Dr. Annie Parrish needs him to take her in his boat up the Rio Negro to Santa Maria. She can't afford to be choosy, either: "Amazon Annie" doesn't have such a pristine reputation herself. But each of them has a dangerous goal, and this trip might very well turn out to be their last. With her smart, sassy dialog and witty style, reminiscent of *Romancing the Stone*, McReynolds shows that high adventure doesn't get much better than this. Shelley Mosley, Glendale P.L., AZ

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From the Inside Flap

Bad-boy scientist Will Travers may have an Ivy League mind but he's got the spirit of the jungle in his heart and the kiss of the Amazon on his body.

River of Eden

With his sun-bronzed skin, a week's worth of beard, and a shaman's crystal around his neck, Will Sanchez Travers looked more like a man mothers warned their daughters about than a Harvard-trained ethnobotanist. And even if only half the rumors about him were true, Dr. Annie Parrish figured she was in trouble. Still, she needed the rogue scientist to ferry her upriver in search of a prize so extraordinary, it would make her reputation if it didn't get her killed first.

When he'd reluctantly agreed to take the legendary Amazon Annie deep into the Brazilian rain forest, Will expected a woman warrior, not a blond ragamuffin renegade whose secrets ran darker than he could have imagined. But once the journey begins, there will be no turning back as they enter territory of the wilderness and the heart as dangerous as it is beautiful, desperate to stop a twisted destroyer of worlds before his nightmarish fantasy becomes horribly real. Amid sorcery, violence, and mystical visions, which will be the victor? the yearning for vengeance, or a power as potent and seductive as the heart of a singular, magical orchid?

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CHAPTER 1

MANAUS, BRAZIL

Drenched to the bone, Dr. Annie Parrish stood in the doorway of the ramshackle waterfront cantina called Pancha's and wiped what she could of the rain off her glasses. Putting them back on, she let her eyes adjust to the dim light. Water dripped off her green shirt and baggy khaki shorts, adding to the mud she'd dragged in with her off the street. The tropical afternoon rain poured down behind her, running off the cantina's tin roof and coursing in streams down the dirt slope to the black waters of the Rio Negro where it flowed past the city of Manaus, Brazil. Inside the tavern, a samba beat blared out of a radio, while a toothless young man added percussion with the rapid beat of his open palms against the bar.

A scattering of seedy-looking patrons littered the shadowy interior, their faces obscured by a pall of cigarette smoke, but it was the couple dancing in front of the bar that held Annie's attention.

The woman was mulatto, her skin a creamy cafe au lait color, her yellow halter top and orange sarong the brightest things in the dingy room. Her partner was chameleonlike in comparison. The most noticeable aspect about him was movement the flick and sway of his hips to the music, the flash of gold bracelets on his upraised arms, the rippling of his open, midnight-blue shirt against his sun-bronzed skin.

The woman was a sunburst. He was a star-flung night, his dark brown hair streaked blond in places and flying with every toss of his head, then falling back into multihued layers that hung low on his neck. Red seed bracelets stacked four inches high around his right ankle were revealed by the rolled-up legs on his black pants, shoroshoro seeds from the forest adding a susurrus of sound with every step he took.

Annie didn't have a clue who the woman was, but the man was William Sanchez Travers, and sure as she was standing there, he didn't look like any Harvard-trained ethnobotanist she'd ever seen, defrocked or not. He looked like the kind of man mothers warned their daughters about and the reason fathers kept shotguns. But he was Annie's best chance for getting upriver, and given that one asset, she was inclined to overlook a lot of faults.

With an absent gesture, she shoved her fingers back through her short-cropped blond hair, slicking the wet strands off her face. A quick pat-down of her pockets proved them bulging with the usual junk, too full to organize, so she stuffed what she could deeper, and ignored the rest. Tidied up as best as she could manage, she squared her shoulders. For better or worse, Travers was exactly the type of man she'd been looking for, broke enough to come cheap and shady enough not to ask too many questions. Annie knew plenty of men who fit that description, but she'd worked in the Amazon long enough to add a third caveat: she needed a man who wouldn't slit her throat in the dead of night. When her research sponsor, Dr. Gabriela Oliveira, had recommended Travers, telling Annie he was back in Manaus and headed upriver to Santa Maria, Annie had figured the ex-Harvard botanist, no matter how degenerate, would more than fit the bill. Hell, she'd read every book he'd ever written, twice.

Now she had an offer to make.

As she started forward, the music slid into a lambada rhythm. Without missing a beat, Travers and his partner came together in a hip-swaying Latin swing that bordered on lewd. Then they took it over the border.

Annie's gaze dropped down the length of their bodies and quickly came back up in a warily skeptical once-over. Anything could happen on a dance floor in Brazil, and it looked like anything might.

She only hoped he and the woman stopped somewhere short of actual public copulation. She didn't have the strength for it after spending half the day looking for him in every seedy, portside dive in Manaus he was known to frequent. There weren't many he'd missed, and after observing his favorite haunts firsthand, she wouldn't put anything past him, even if only half of the rest of what she'd heard about him was true.

Three years ago, he'd forsaken academia and his fieldwork and disappeared into the Amazon rain forest. The rumors had been bountiful and gruesome: he'd been eaten by an anaconda; he'd taken one too many hallucinogenic trips on the Banisteriopsis caapi liana and was living in a near vegetative state in a cave near the headwaters of the Putumayo; or, and this had been Annie's favorite, he'd had his head shrunk by the Jivaro. No bones or body, vegetative or otherwise, and no identifiable shrunken head had ever been found. A year later, he'd disproved all the rumors by resurfacing in Manaus safe, though not necessarily sound. The verdict was still out on his mental state, way out.

Looking at him now, Annie would guess he'd abandoned botany for his true calling as a sambista. The kind

of moves he was making were grounds for arrest in some countries: arms down, shoulders loose and rolling, his hips doing a buck-and-shimmy against the woman's. Rumor said Gabriela had been the one to bail him out with Howard Pharmaceutical Labs, the company funding his research. Even so, half a dozen lawsuits were still waiting for him back in the States, compliments of old man Howard, who hadn't planned on his high-priced glory boy disappearing without delivering some new magically medicinal plant Howard Labs could make millions of dollars synthesizing.

Well, she thought, that bright hope had sure gone to hell in a handbasket, with the way smoothed by more than a few bottles of rotgut cacha, Brazilian sugarcane alcohol. It was a damn shame, but all Will Travers was known for now was ferrying people up and down the Rio Negro and the Rio Solimoes and showing up in the Manaus bars often enough to qualify as a waterfront attraction.

At six feet, he had the gringo looks for it, tall and rangy, with that wild, sun-streaked hair and a face that had set more than one coed on the path to a botany degree.

Annie was way past the coed stage of her life, but from what she could see of him, he hadn't lost his poster-boy looks, even if the veneer of his Harvard days had worn so damn thin as to be invisible.

He probably didn't know it, but he'd once one-upped her on a plant identification, getting his specimen in mere days ahead of hers. Since then, for all time, whenever anybody enjoyed a certain South American balsam herb in their garden, the label read *Dicliptera traversii*, instead of *Dicliptera parrishii*. It was as close as she'd ever gotten to getting the best of him. Then he'd gone and dropped out of the game, and that was the real damn shame.

As she watched him dance, her mouth curved into a rueful grin. What a waste, she thought, and what a great opportunity for her. With William Travers out of the running, a place in the history books was up for grabs, and she was going to take it. Still, she would have loved to have met him in his prime and given him a run for his money, before he'd gone to seed, and like everyone else in the Amazon and academia, she couldn't help but wonder what in the hell had happened to him. He'd been on top of the world before he'd gone off and gotten himself lost.

The music changed again, and Travers grasped his partner's waist with both hands. The woman went willingly into his embrace, the two of them slithering together in a serpentine mating dance.

"Damn," she muttered. They really were going to do the deed right there on the dance floor, as if she didn't already have enough problems.

Johnny Chang, the two-bit felon she'd been dealing with all week, had warned her to leave Manaus once their business was done, and God knew she'd tried, but the boat she'd been counting on had gone belly-up and left her dry-docked. She couldn't afford any more delays. She had to be out of the city by morning.

She glanced out the door. The rain looked as if it would go on forever.

The radio sputtered to a stop behind her, and the sudden quiet drew her attention back to the bar and a bit of good news: Travers still had his pants on.

Thank God for little favors, she thought and moved forward. She needed to cut her deal while she still had the chance.

“Dr. Travers,” she said, pitching her voice to carry above the racket of the rain on the roof.

The man she'd been tracking all over the waterfront turned, weaving slightly with the woman still in his arms, and Annie had to fight back a pang of irritation. Drunk before three o'clock, he was in worse shape than she'd expected, and she hadn't expected much. On the other hand, with him two sheets to the wind, talking herself onto his boat ought to be a piece of cake.

“Dr. Travers,” she repeated, approaching him with a smile firmly in place. She'd never been much in the bees-and-honey department, but she knew enough to make nice when she wanted something.

“Will,” he said, smiling back, his dark-eyed gaze slightly confused as he studied her face. He had a day's growth of stubble along his jaw, macaw feathers tied into his hair behind his left ear, and possibly the longest, thickest eyelashes she'd ever seen on a grown man. “Just Will.” With a glance over his shoulder and a gesture, he ordered a beer. The woman was plastered to him.

Probably holding him up, Annie thought, exasperated with herself for needing him. He and the woman leaned a bit too far, having to take a half-step to stay upright, and Annie couldn't even keep a forced smile on her face. No doubt about it, he'd started his party hours ago and was headed downhill. His hair was wildly disheveled. His shirt was completely unbuttoned, and with his pants low slung and hanging by a thread and the grace of God on his hips, he looked as if h...

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