

A Girl Who Loved Pistils—Dispatch from the 8th Continent

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This summer, I will be researching and drafting a book proposal called *A Girl Who Loved Pistils—Dispatch from the 8th Continent*. This book will feature stories of exploration of tropical rain forest canopies, a new frontier of science (akin to the use of SCUBA in the mid-twentieth century), but will do more than simply depict adventure. It will feature the life and excitement of the forest canopy as a backdrop for some of nature's most vivid and swashbuckling stories. This book will also share the hurdles faced by women in professions that are usually reserved for men, breaking the barriers and hopefully inspiring young readers to pursue such careers in the next generation. In addition, I will focus on global environmental challenges, and how creative tools and actions led to successful outcomes, providing the "secret sauce" for best practices in field research, education, and conservation.

This book deals with sex, lust, marauders, harassment, camouflage, weaponry, ropes, sling shots, and other life-n-death matters. In addition to the swashbuckling adventures of Mother Nature, it is also the tale of a geeky girl who grew up in a very average American rural town but had a strange passion for pistils. Not the kind that shoot bullets, a.k.a. pistols, but the kind that incite sex, such as the oftentimes gaudy and robust female center of flowers that contain the sexual parts needed for reproduction. These floral organs are the innocent progenitors of many adventures for this nerdy girl, leading her on a lifelong global quest to save plants, especially tropical trees and their inhabitants. The real heroes of this story are the trees that inspire her to design methods to climb into their uppermost branches, and in turn make discoveries that improve our understanding of the critical importance of global forests. The mini-heroes are leaves—millions of green objects that bespeckle the canopy and in turn provide energy that drives all life on Earth. The treetops are a brutal, dog-eat-dog environment—wild winds, monsoonal rains, fierce munching beetles, aggressive pollinators, greedy monkeys, and branch-breaking parrots threaten the existence of the essential leaves and branches in this uppermost ceiling of the planet. But our arbournaut climbs again and again to learn the secrets of this so-called eighth continent of the Earth.

Why are trees elevated to hero status? In botanical terms, trees have evolved over time with amazing and diverse defense mechanisms to stay alive. How can trees survive when they cannot run away from their enemies? It requires a subtle and devious strategy to devise poisons, stinging hairs, thorns, growth patterns, and even colors that deter enemies when rooted into the ground; but our tree-heroes have done all that to stay on top of the dastardly beetles and pathogens that threaten their future. Our field reporter aka author uncovers the one villain from which trees cannot defend—humans! My tales of forest degradation and clearing leave the reader cheering for the green plants, in hopes they can outwit these diabolical humans and that this true fairy tale of forests versus humans will have a happy ending. Many of my stories of perspiration and inspiration provide hope for young readers who want to grow up in a world where they can someday come face-to-face with a scarlet macaw, appreciate the brilliant red canopy of a flowering Australian flame tree, or gaze at sunset across a vast expanse of greenery from a treetop walkway above the mighty Amazon river.