

Venom

**A One-Round Living Jungle Tournament For
Malatran Heroes of All Levels**

by Jean Rabe

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This is a standard RPGA Network tournament. A four-hour time block has been set aside for this event. It is a good idea to ask each player to put a name tag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name, race, and gender at the top. This makes it easier for the players to keep track of who is playing which character.

The actual playing time will be about three hours. Make sure you use the last 20 to 30 minutes of the event time block to have the players capsule their characters for each other and vote. The standard RPGA Network voting procedures will be used. Complete the Judge's Summary before you collect the players' scoring sheets. This way you will not be influenced by their ratings and comments.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment and weapons their characters are carrying.

A note about the text: Some of the text in this module is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in *oblique font*. It is strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

Welcome to the Living Jungle!

If this is the first time you've judged a Living Jungle adventure, be sure to obtain a copy of the Judge guidelines from your event coordinator. In any event, review the use of optional rules (especially the "At Death's Door" rule) before beginning play.

The Living Jungle is a tournament campaign exclusively for members of the RPGA Network. Be sure that you distribute scoring sheets at the *beginning* of the round, and make sure that each player at your table has a membership card (or at least remembers his or her membership number).

This tournament should include:

- 20 pages of text
- 6 Hero Point Certificates
- 7 Treasure Certificates

This is a low / mid-level Living Jungle adventure; only characters of sixth level or below may participate in it. If a player brings a higher-level character to your

table, explain that he or she must use a lower-level hero (or start a new hero) to play in this event. If your players do not have heroes, help them create new ones (see your event coordinator for character creation instructions if you don't have them).

During the course of the adventure, the heroes will earn experience points based on their accomplishments. Some of these points are for overcoming obstacles, finding information, defeating monsters, and recovering treasure. After each encounter an experience point value is listed. This is summarized at the end of the adventure as well. *All characters contributing to the success of an encounter receive the listed experience points.*

For example, if an encounter lists an experience point value of 100, then each hero participating earns 100 points. All experience points are awarded at the end of the tournament. Do not award experience points after each encounter.

In some places the characters can gain treasure. For common items, like normal weapons and equipment, the players simply record the new items on their character sheets. But for magical or other special items, you must hand the appropriate Treasure Certificate, included with this tournament.

DM's Summary

The heroes must search for a venomous creature that bit one of their friends. By capturing the creature, the saru shaman Matula can prepare an antidote that will save their friend's life. Finding the creature will not be easy, and therein lies the adventure. (However, the hero will not die even if the creature isn't found.)

Begin the tournament by explaining that the player characters know each other, and they happened to be together this fateful day in Malatra. Look over the heroes and select one to be the bite victim. Choose a lower-level character or one belonging to someone who is not typically an outgoing role-player. Being thrust into the role of this tournament's plot device could make a shy player more active. Take the player aside and explain that during the night his character was bitten. If the player objects to the situation, simply choose another player. There are two fang marks on his arm, and the area is red and swollen.

Feverish and lightheaded, he was carried by his friends to the shaman Matula, a saru introduced in the tournament *Once Broken* who they aided years past. Matula pronounced the bite venomous and said a cure must be concocted or the bite victim could very likely die.

The adventure uses creatures created by Kevin Melka appearing in DRAGON Magazine #237 "Dragon's Bestiary: Venomous!" The creatures' poisons have been altered in this tournament to make them less lethal.

Introduction

"Travel along the Stream of Shadows," Matula, the saru shaman, told you. "It is there where you will find the tree with six limbs and one high, hollow spot."

You were quick to follow the aged saru's instructions, leaving shortly after dawn. The sun is directly overhead now, baking the land and making you sweat. Would that you could find a place to rest and to hide from the heat. But you dare not stop—not if you are to save the life of _____.

Sometime during the night _____ had been bitten. The pain awoke him, and his cry awoke the rest of you. The snake which struck him was nowhere to be found. Twin puncture marks were on his arm, and the area around the bite was red and greatly swollen. Your friend was feverish, babbling, and you feared that whatever bit him might be venomous.

Acting promptly, you took him to Matula, the only shaman you knew who lived in this part of the jungle. The shaman confirmed that your friend had been poisoned, and he quickly set about to mix an awful-smelling brew that he forced _____ to drink.

"I know not what kind of snake bit you," the saru said. "But whatever it was had most potent venom. That which you just drank might save your life. But I cannot be certain. The mixture might only give you more time, hold off the venom for a while and hide your fever. Let your mind and body work. There is only one way to insure a cure, and that is to find the snake, or one like it. I can use the snake to create something to cleanse your body. The snake must be alive."

All of you agreed to search for the snake. But where to look?

Matula, of course, had the answer. Using a charred bark, he drew a picture of a tree on a piece of hide.

At this point, allow hero spellcasters to select their spells. Heroes who attempt to use *slow poison* or *neutralize poison* spells on their fellow will discover that the spells have no effect. Besides, Matula already

cast those. Heroes with healing proficiencies can tell that spells alone will not guarantee that their friend will live. Whatever bit their friend indeed had very potent venom. They'll have to follow Matula's advice, and hence follow the course of the adventure, if they want to gain a certain cure for their friend.

When the heroes are ready, continue with the rest of the introduction:

"Travel along the Stream of Shadows," Matula repeated. "Travel until you spy the serpent's tail. It is there where you will find the tree with six limbs and one high, hollow spot—a tree looking like an unusual, withered hand."

The saru shaman wrapped _____'s arm in thick cloth made from arula leaves, and smiled weakly.

"There is a woman who knows about Malatra's serpents—knows more than any shaman, knows even more than the great Bengoukee. She loves the scaly ones, is able to talk to them. It is she who you must seek. She was old when I met her years ago—when she saved my life from a spitting snake. She is older now, this wise Nubari, but as ageless as the very jungle. She lives near this tree.

"The woman is called the Dark One, the Ageless One, the Black Mother, the Serpent Charmer. Treat her with respect and she will not kill you. Injure not her guardians, and you should be safe. Heed my words in this, or more than _____ will face death. Show her your wound. She will know what snake caused this. And if you have not angered her, she will help. Perhaps she can even see to a cure. Tell her I sent you."

Matula fingered a pouch at his side and pulled free a handful of berries. He gave them to you.

"If you cannot find her tree, you will need these halrath fruits," the saru said. "They are rare, and they are terribly bitter tasting. The green ones will allow you to converse with the animals of the jungle, the red ones will let you talk to the plants. I have no doubt that some of the animals and plants near the serpent's tail will know where the Serpent Charmer is.

"The fruits will dry within the passing of two moons and will become useless. So call upon their potential while they are yet fresh. I have only eight green ones and four red ones. But these dozen should be more than enough.

"Hurry now," he added with some urgency to his raspy voice. "If my brew only slowed the

venom in your body, you will have but a few days left to breathe. If the Ageless One does not or cannot cure you, hurry back to me with the live snake—like the one that bit you—so that I may fashion a cure from its venom.”

He thrust the hide with the sketch of the tree at you and waved his hairy arm, indicating you should be on your way.

About the berries: eating a berry allows a hero to speak with one designated animal—mammal, reptile, or fish, as a *speak with animals* spell, for five minutes of real time. Look at your watch when a player says his character is eating a berry. In a later section, several animals and plants are listed, along with the bits of knowledge they have. If the heroes talk to other animals and plants, feel free to make up information, which might or might not be pertinent to the adventure. There are eight green (animals) berries and four red (plants) berries. Give the heroes a few minutes to role-play and to discuss the adventure. Then, continue with the following.

The Stream of Shadows gets its name because of its dark, sluggish water. Plants grow thick along its banks and along its bottom, making the stream look green and murky. The fish that swim in it look like shadows darting here and there—appearing to weave in and out of the shadows cast by the branches that overhang the water.

Here the stream is narrower and twists. Its path seems to undulate like a snake. This must be the serpent’s tail that Matula the shaman spoke of. Now to find the tree. There are certainly plenty of trees around. More than you can count. Where to start?

SEARCHING FOR THE TREE

If the heroes start searching for the tree before trying to talk to the animals, determine who is looking and ask what they are looking for. There are only a few dead trees in this part of the jungle, and the living ones are so overgrown with leaves, moss, and vines, that it is impossible to tell exactly how many major limbs they have unless a hero is at the trunk and is looking up and counting.

heroes able to shape shift into snakes, birds, and other creatures will have an easier time moving between the trees and counting branches. Saru heroes, if they are intelligent enough to count, should also

have a fairly easy time. Paraphrase or read the following to describe the trees:

The trees in this part of the jungle are giants, their tops stretching to the clouds above, daring to reach for the midday sun. Their trunks are as big around as a large garuda’s belly, and their roots are massive and dig deep into the ground and into the bank of the Stream of Shadows. Their leaves hide the number of their branches.

There are small trees, too, fighting for space amid the giants. Little light reaches them. The canopy from their great brothers hides the sun, and cuts some of the heat.

It will take twenty-four hours of searching to find the great tree with six limbs. That could mean one hero searching the entire twenty-four hours or six heroes each searching four hours. For each three- or four-hour block of time the heroes spend searching, they will attract an unfriendly plant, insect, or animal which will, of course, attack.

Use the creatures below. For lower-level heroes, use the less-threatening creatures or reduce the creatures’ hit points. If the heroes seem to be particularly tough or have a lot of hit points, just increase the number of the creatures that appear from one to three, or increase their hit points.

It is possible the heroes will try to converse with the creatures, using the fruit. The following creatures know nothing of the Dark One, the Black Mother, or the six-limbed tree. They will talk only about food—which to them is the heroes. Plants along the bank know roughly where to find the six-limbed tree.

Tiger (1): INT semi-; AL N; AC 6; MV 12; HD 5+5; hp 36; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1/1d4+1/1-10; SA Rear claws rake for 2d4; SD Nil; MR Nil; S L (6' long); ML 10 (ave.)

The tiger has been searching for prey for the past few days and has been continually frustrated. He is old and no longer a good hunter. A hero tiger katanga can tell the animal is old and hungry just by observing it, as can a hero with animal lore. The tiger will attempt to escape if it suffers 18 or more points of damage. It is not stupid, and will not fight to the death. It will break off its attack if one or more of the heroes offer it food.

Boring grass (1): INT non-; AL N; AC 8; MV 0; HD 4; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 5d4; SA boring, poison; SD must be dug up or burned; MR Nil; S L (6' across); ML 20 (fearless)

From the Monstrous Compendium: “This grass has corkscrew blades that aggressively dig into any material that

comes into contact with it. Magical protections, leather soles, and thick cloth delay the grass's attack for one round as the grass moves through the protection. However, the grass cannot bore through metal. Penetrated materials do not count as protection, so a human in leather armor would have an effective Armor Class of 10 the second round of contact. Once the grass hits exposed flesh, it burrows in, inflicting 5d4 points of damage. Further, the creature must save vs. poison or be paralyzed by secretions from the grass. Those making a successful saving throw are *slowed* to half their normal movement rate; this effect lasts for 1d4 turns or until a *neutralize poison* spell is used to counter it. A victim can pull free of the grass with a successful Strength roll, but will take 2d4 points of damage. Boring grass can be effectively damaged only by fire or by careful digging and removal from the soil."

The boring grass, if talked to, will discuss only food. It knows nothing of a six-limbed tree or any individual the heroes might be looking for.

Thorny (1): INT animal; AL N; AC 3; MV 15; HD 4; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1; SA thorn rake; SD Nil; MR Nil; S M (4' long); ML 12 (steady)

"Thornies are plant creatures covered by a spiky bark. A thorny attacks first with its bite; if the bite hits, the creature tries to roll its body against its victim, causing 3d4 points of damage with a successful hit."

The thornies know about the six-limbed tree and will give the heroes directions there.

Giant Sundew (1): INT semi-; AL N; AC 7; MV 1; HD 8; hp 50; THAC0 13; #AT 6 per target; Dmg 1-3; SA Nil; SD see below; MR Nil; S M (4' tall); ML 11 (steady)

"A giant sundew appears to be a 3- to 4- foot mound of grayish green, tarry ropes or rags. The air around one is fly-infested and holds a thick odor like sweet syrup. Preferring shaded places in which to grow, the sundew has only hairlike roots that anchor it in place. It can pull itself slowly along the ground using sticky tendrils. Due to the plant's sticky exterior, missiles and fire-based attacks inflict only half damage. The sundew detects moving creatures by vibrations. When anything moves within 5 feet of it, it lashes out with its tendrils. Its body is covered with hundreds of tendrils, and a maximum of six can attack each creature in range, each round. The tendrils exude sticky globs of sap. For every three tendrils that attach to a victim, the victim suffers a -1 penalty to attack rolls. The sap contains a mild enzyme that inflicts 1 point of damage per round for each tendril striking a victim, regardless of whether or not the tendril is still attached. A successful open doors roll breaks a tendril; each tendril must be checked separately, up to once per tendril, per round."

The giant sundew is not especially bright and will not be able to help the heroes locate the Earth Mother or the six-limbed tree. It will talk about water, sun, and food.

Giant Tick (1): INT non-; AL N; AC 3; MV 3; HD 4; hp 22; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4; SA Blood drain after initial strike for 1d6 per round; SD Nil; MR Nil; S S (1' long); ML 10 (average)

Giant Wasp (1): INT non-; AL N; AC 4; MV 6, Fl 21; HD 4; hp 20; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 2d4/1d4; SA Nil; SD Nil; MR Nil; S S (2' long); ML 10 (ave)

SPEAKING WITH THE ANIMALS

There is an abundance of animals around the Stream of Shadows. It is unlikely they will try to talk to all of them. Read the following to the heroes:

Animal life teems about the Stream of Shadows. You spy fish darting here and there in the dark water. There are toads on the bank, big mottled-skinned ones who lazily catch flies.

Overhead, there are brightly-colored parrots and small-billed birds the shade of the night sky.

You see snakes draped from the lowest branches of trees. A pair of pangolin play at the stream's edge. Across from them a wild pig drinks from the slow-moving water. Nearby, a jaguar eyes the plump beast. Its belly obviously full, the great cat yawns and stretches in the shade. The pig will live—for now.

Fish: The fish talk quickly and laugh like a bubbling brook. They will relate the information in quotes, as well as asking the heroes what it is like to breathe air and walk on the earth.

"Looking for trees? Only bits of trees grow in the water. See? Roots. They drink like the animals drink. Like we drink. Want us to find a tree with six roots? Only find six roots in the water. We will not go out of the water to count roots for you. How many is six?"

"Looking for the Black Mother, the Dark One, the Ageless One? She comes to the water to drink sometimes. Was here a while ago when the sun was just waking up. What does she look like? Like the Black Mother. She is not a fish. She is the Serpent Charmer. The Fish Friend. She is powerful. With the blink of an eye she can breathe water like us, swim with us and play with us. Not usually swim long, though. The Fish Friend is always busy."

Toad: The toad talks slow and licks its lips constantly. It is never in a hurry and is more interested in the flies than the heroes--unless the heroes give it some tasty insects.

"Trees do not interest me. I like the ground. I like the ground best when it is wet and oozing, when it tries to swallow my feet. The ground feels good then. The trees like the ground when it is wet, too. They drink from the wet ground. I do not pay attention to the trees. I watch the insects, which I like to eat. And I watch for the snakes, which like to eat toads."

"You want to know about the Black Mother, the Dark One, The Friend of Toads. I love the Black Mother. She scratches my back. The Friend of Toads makes me feel good and talks to me. She loves me. She even loves the snakes, too, which like to eat toads. But the snakes do not threaten me when The Friend of Toads is about. Nothing threatens me then. The Serpent Charmer keeps us all safe. She lives by that tree, which I pay attention to only because she lives there. Biggest tree in all of jungle. I do not go to the tree to visit her, though. There is a big brown snake inside. The Friend of Toads likes the big brown snake. But I do not like it. I am afraid it will eat me. Do you love The Friend of Toads, too?"

Note whether any hero touches the toad. If so, consult the following:

Neotropical toad (1): INT animal; AL N; AC 8; MV 3, hop 3; HD 1; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg Nil; SA Poison; SD Nil; MR Nil; S T (8" long); ML 8 (average)

These toads are identified by horizontal pupils and large poison glands behind the eyes. They can weigh up to a pound. They live in areas where insects are plentiful. The following is excerpted from Dragon Magazine #237: "Like poisonous frogs, neotropical toads secrete a venom when irritated or threatened. The venom of this toad is cardiotoxic, disrupting normal heart rhythms if ingested or introduced in the blood stream. If simply touched, the victim suffers from stinging, burning, and numbness in the exposed area for 1d6 hours. If this is a hand, nothing can be held for that period of time due to irritation. A poisoned victim must make a saving throw for each round of contact with the toad, with a -2 penalty if the poison is introduced into an open wound, swallowed, or delivered via an envenomed weapon. If this saving throw is failed, the victim suffers from tightness in the chest, convulsions, salivation, and seizures." Failure results in the victim suffering damage equivalent to a harm spell--i.e., left with 1d4 hit points.

Snakes: The snakes use lots of SSSS in their speech and sound raspy.

"You ssseek a tree with sssix limbs. Only one in our jungle. Sssacred tree. Ssserpent Charmer sss tree.

Tree of Sssnake Friend. If you mean to hurt the tree, we will hurt you, sssqueeze you tight ass we sssqueeze the toadsss and rodentsss. Sssqueeze you until your bonesss crack. Then we will leave you for the carrion birdsss. If you mean no harm, you will find the tree by finding the tallessst one not far from the ssstream. Tallessst one in all of jungle. The weeping tree with one large eye. We will watch you. If you harm the tree or our loved Sssnake Friend, we will sssqueeze you."

"Who is the Sssnake Friend? Ssshe is the jungle. Ssshe is not weak like you, not like you at all. Ssshe is ssstrong like us, ssstrong like the jungle."

Jaguar: The jaguar snarls when it talks and raises its upper lip. Because it recently fed, it is not hungry and will not attack the heroes.

"You seek a tree that looks like a paw? Look under the branches, for the leaves hide the limbs. But the limbs are not hidden from me. I dance upon them, leap and sleep on them. Nothing hides the limbs from my very good eyes. The tree like the hand has roots that drink from the water. Thick, black roots that look like snakes. It has few limbs, but they are big and very much comfortable. Sometimes I lay upon them. Sleep safe at night. Nothing bothers the tree, for the Jaguar Friend lives there. She is called the Black Mother by some, but the Jaguar Friend by most. If you mean her harm, I will kill you. I am sworn to protect the Jaguar Friend. If you seek to talk to her, approach her without weapons. Do not threaten her. Bring her a gift. The Jaguar Friend, like Nubari women, likes pretty things."

The jaguar will not attack the heroes unless they first attack it. It will not fight to the death, but will attempt to get away at the first opportunity.

Jaguar (1): INT semi-; AL N; AC 6; MV 15; HD 4+1; hp 26; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-8; SA rear claws rake for 1-4+1/1-4+1; SD surprised only on a 1; MR Nil; S M (6' long); ML 9 (average)

Parrots: They repeat things the heroes say, such as repeating a hero's question before answering it, then repeating their own answer. They bob their heads when they talk and pause to preen themselves.

"Like trees we do. Like trees we do. Like them lots. Like them lots. Like all trees, but mostly the big ones. The big trees have limbs that touch the sky. And we like the sky. We like the sky. We sit on the highest limbs and look down at the jungle. Look at the snakes and the pigs. Look at the silly saru, the Nubari. Look at the little hairy men who boast in words we don't

understand. Look at the little ones with tattoos who do not walk in the jungle alone.

“We are the greatest in all of the jungle. We and the trees are the greatest. You look for a tree with six limbs? How many is six? If six are not many, there is only one tree you look for. The tree is our friend, too. We like trees. Yes, we truly like trees. Especially that tree. Only one tree with very few limbs. Fewer than a flock of us. The limbs number fewer than a flock of us. Biggest tree in all of jungle. Thick limbs the jaguar likes to sleep on. Thick limbs for the jaguar. We are not afraid of the jaguar when we perch on the tree. Nothing will harm us on that tree. The Parrot Friend lives inside the tree and keeps everyone there safe. We like the Parrot Friend. Have you come to visit the Parrot Friend? She talks to us just like you talk to us. We like to talk. The Parrot Friend’s tree is at the end of the stream, the tree with night-colored roots. There, see it? Do not carry sharp, pointy things inside the tree. The Parrot Friend would not like that very much.”

Black birds: These are actually blue-black hawks native to Malatra. They have a bit of magic about them, and they are very intelligent as far as birds go. They will readily share their information with the heroes. When they talk, they spread their wings and narrow their eyes, as if they are squinting into the sun.

“You seek the tree with six limbs. It is the Earth Queen’s tree, the Serpent Charmer, the old-she who has befriended all the animals who live along the Stream of Shadows. She is magical, powerful, and she is able to look inside you, see your heart and mind, knows your purpose. Use no weapons against her, for she is more powerful than the sharpest of spears. Use no enchantments, for she will only laugh at you. She lives inside the large black-trunked tree. It is the tallest tree in this part of the jungle. Look for the hollow spot hidden by the veil of leaves.

“Like us, she appreciates things that shine, pretty things, like the things you wear about your neck. If you do not wish to part with your shiny things, hide them now.”

Wild pig: The pig is very thirsty. It was chased by a tiger and is drinking a lot of water to make itself feel better. It will talk to the heroes between gulps of water. And it will frequently ask the heroes if they intend to eat it. If the heroes want to kill the pig, it will be no great feat. One simple dagger or spear thrust will do the little fellow in.

“Don’t pay attention to trees I don’t. Don’t pay attention except for their roots. Grubs and such

around the roots. Good to eat. Mmmmm. Don’t pay much attention to the branches except when I need some shade. Need some shade after my run. Ran fast, I did. Ran away from the tiger. Ran right to Pig Friend’s shadowy stream. The tiger won’t eat me here. You won’t eat me either, will you? The Pig Friend, The Snake Charmer, will eat you in turn.

“I know where the Pig Friend lives. In the tree at the end of the stream. The tree with bark the color of soft, squishy mud. She lives in the branches somewhere, and once in a while—not nearly often enough—she comes down and scratches my ears and talks to me. She is a friend to all of the animals here. And she is smart. So very, very smart. She is even as smart as me! Give her something to show you are friendly. A pretty something. Unlike me, you have lots of things you could give her. You carry so much! I only give her grubs. But she eats them. Mmmmm.

“If you want help from her, you will have to do something for her. Pig Friend is smart enough to not to do something for others without first getting something from them.

“And be nice to her and her tree!”

Pangolins: The pair of pangolins are mates and have chosen to live along the Stream of Shadows because they’ve discovered it is safe here. They are new arrivals and have not yet met the Black Mother. One of them will start a sentence and the other will finish it. Give one a lilting feminine voice that always begins sentences with a “yes,” and the other a deeper, masculine voice. They are not afraid of the heroes. In fact, they are curious about them.

“Yes, you want to know about . . .”

“Some woman. They said they want to know about some woman.”

“Yes, I understand that. But I do not know about . . .”

“Some woman. Some Nubari likely. We know nothing about a woman. We only know about the stream and the thirsty pig. We know about the parrots who chatter and fly about. And we know about . . .”

“Yes, the fish. We know about the fish. We like to watch the fish. And we watch the mysterious black birds. Beautiful birds. We know about . . .”

“Trees. We know about trees. There are lots of trees. Always and forever trees in the jungle. This part of the jungle is our home because it is safe here. Animals do not kill each other near the stream. Eat only grubs and flying insects and roots. Away from the stream animals eat animals. But not near the stream. Near the stream . . .”

“Yes, near the stream it is safe. It is because of the oh-so-big-tree that everything is safe, I think. That big,

black tree with limbs the number of a lizard's paw. It has ..."

"So many leaves that you cannot count its branches. But it has few big branches. And it has a hollow spot. Odd, but the ..."

"Yes, the hollow spot. It blinks open and close if you watch it carefully. Like an eye. The big black tree is ..."

"Alive like the animals who live near the stream. All around the stream it is safe, I think, because of the big, black tree."

The pair of pangolins will proceed to ask the heroes all sorts of questions about where they came from, what brought them to the shadowy stream, why they are interested in the black tree, what they ate yesterday, what they intend to eat tomorrow, how many offspring they have, if they have mates, etc. The pangolins will not stop asking questions until the effect of the *Speak with Animals* berry has worn off or the heroes wander away.

The Great Tree of Life

When the heroes have found the tree, either by taking a long time searching or by speaking with the animals, read the following:

The tree you sought is one of the largest in all of Malatra. It is taller than a dozen Nubari, and it is as thick as a giant garuda.

Its bark is as black as the night sky, rough, yet looking oddly smooth in many places. The whorls along its trunk are beautiful, as if they were carved by an artist. You see designs in them.

Six massive limbs jut from the trunk and stretch like an open hand toward the sky. Smaller branches sprout from them, looking like spiderwebs. The leaves are a myriad of greens, from the palest hue that looks practically white to deep greens that look black. Scattered on its smaller branches are trinkets--bead necklaces, polished wooden bracelets, strings of feathers, a willow-wood cup, a carved bowl. They decorate the tree and make pleasant klinking-klacking noises in the slight breeze.

Funny, you didn't notice just how unusual and striking this tree was until you stood at its base. From a distance, it looked no different from the willows that cling to the bank of the Stream of Shadows.

Peering up its trunk, you see a single hollow spot more than four Nubari high above the ground.

The Great Tree of Life is a creature--an ancient treant that decided to take root in this part of the jungle. It watches over the wildlife in the area and will not permit the animals to kill and eat each other here. The heroes are another matter. If they killed any of the creatures along the bank, the tree will accept their actions--once, as they are foolish strangers and do not know the way of the land.

However, if the heroes establish communication with the tree, it will let them know it is very unhappy that they killed a creature its territory. And it will try to warn the heroes that they should not kill here again.

Climbing the tree: Any hero who attempts to climb the tree will notice that the hollow spot on the tree's trunk has suddenly closed, as if it were an eye blinking. Further, the tree will attempt to throw off any climbing hero (unless communication has been established). It does this with a successful "to hit" roll merely by shaking its trunk and limbs.

Stealing trinkets from the tree: If a hero tries to take a necklace, bowl, or whatever from the tree, the tree grasps the item firmly in its tiny branches and will shake off the offender, as mentioned above or will swat the offender with a free branch. Persistent heroes could be rewarded and gain a trinket. There are no certificates for the items.

Attacking the tree: If the heroes attack the tree, it will fight back. Though it has no desire to kill any creature, it will kill in self defense. Heroes who break off the fight are left alone. The tree will not communicate with any heroes who attacked it. Nor will it let any of the combatant heroes climb inside its trunk. Heroes who attacked the tree will have to sit out the part of the adventure that goes on inside the tree.

If the heroes inflict more than 40 points of damage on the Great Tree of Life, the two creatures inside will come out and join in the battle. Those heroes who do not run away at this point will very likely die.

The Great Tree of Life (1): INT very; AL NG; AC 3; MV 1; HD 18; hp 135; THAC0 5; #AT 3; Dmg 2-12/2-12/2-12; SA Regenerates 1 hit point a round; SD Nil; MR Nil; S H (75' tall); ML 20 (fierce)

Talking to the tree: The treant, unlike others of its kind, is not able to speak. Decades ago it contracted a disease which rotted out most of its insides, including its vocal chords, and stole its ability to talk. It was cured by the Black Mother. However, she could not restore its ability to speak. Heroes who try to eat one

of the red berries in an effort to speak with the tree will be able to communicate telepathically with it.

The Great Tree of Life understands Nubari, Saru, Korobukuru, and is able to understand all the animals in the area as if it were under the effects of a permanent *Speak with animals* spell.

If the heroes realize the tree is intelligent, they might try to talk with it, getting it to waggle its branches for yes or scrunch the whorls together for no—if they did not think to use a red berry. Its trunk might move from side to side to show its displeasure, or its hollow spot might take the shape of a smile to signify agreement. Use your judgment on what the heroes do to communicate. The tree can bend its branches to the ground to sketch animals or to pat the top of a hero's head. The branches can also slap uncooperative heroes or nudge away those who argue too much.

The Great Tree of Life knows the following:

- The woman called the Black Mother lives inside his trunk. She is also called the Earth Queen, Snake Charmer, Ancient One, Friend of the Fishes, Pig Friend, and all manners of other names.
- The Ancient One is not a Nubari, though she was a long time ago. She can assume whatever guise she wishes, though it is almost always an animal.
- She favors snakes and often takes the form of a black one. She is dangerous in this form, dangerous in any form if she is angered.
- She knows about all sorts of animals in the jungle, but mostly reptiles. She spends most of her time in the company of snakes, lizards, frogs, and newts. She knows about venom and can cure many bites.
- Take no fire inside! heroes will not be permitted to enter if they are carrying torches or things that would be perceived as torches.
- She appreciates things of beauty, hence the Great Tree of Life moves the whorls about on its trunk so she can appreciate the patterns inside, too.
- The Ancient One, like the Great Tree, protects the animals in this part of the jungle. She and the tree recognize the need for the animals to kill each other for food. However, here is a place of safety, a place where blood was not meant to seep into the ground.
- She has one guardian inside the trunk, a snake that is large and temperamental. If you brandish weapons at it, the snake will spit. Keep your weapons hidden or outside. If you kill her guardian, the Ancient One will not help you. Indeed, you had better run for your lives.

- If the heroes want to visit the Ancient One, they have merely to go inside the Great Tree. He will open the hollow spot, allowing them access. However, they must first make it clear they mean the Ancient One no harm and they need her help. (Showing the tree the hero's wound will do.) The tree would prefer the heroes leave their weapons outside. However, he will not press this point if the heroes have made it clear they are friendly.
- The bits of jewelry and trinkets on the small branches are gifts that were given to the Great Tree of Life. He will not willingly relinquish the baubles. However, he is more than happy to add to them.

Gifting the tree: If the heroes hang trinkets, such as necklaces, bracelets, sculptures, or other baubles on the Great Tree's branches, the tree rewards them. Determine how many heroes are leaving gifts—don't encourage them, and the tree will not ask for presents. When the gifting is finished, the tree shakes off a leaf for each generous hero. Heroes who did not give the Tree an offering, and who now try to do so because they think they will get something, will come up empty-handed.

Sarus and monkey katangas who gave the tree something will get a piece of bark instead of a leaf. The ancient tree dearly loves the jungle's "tree children" and goes out its way to favor them above all other races.

The tree tries to pantomime with its branches that the bark should be eaten and the leaves should be worn. If necessary, the tree will take its tiny branches and try to put the bark in a hero saru's mouth and the leaves behind a hero's ear.

The bark: eating a piece of the Great Tree grants a saru or monkey katanga five extra permanent hit points. There are certificates for the bark at the end of this tournament.

The leaves: heroes who wear a leaf ignore the first 12 points of damage inflicted on them by a hostile plant. Once the leaves absorb the damage, they crumble and are useless. The heroes are immediately aware of what the leaves can do. There are certificates for the leaves.

When the heroes go inside the Great Tree of Life, continue with the following:

The tree opens a hole on its trunk. It is high up, roughly four Nubari off the ground. You will have to climb to get inside. The tree is making it a little easier, lowering one of its branches to help.

You slip inside the opening and discover a passage that slopes down. Though steep, you are able to keep your footing.

It is damp inside the tree, and you feel moss along the passage. Enough light slips in through the opening that you can see your surroundings.

The wood inside looks polished, like the inside of a well-crafted cup or bowl, and the whorls are decorative and ever-changing.

The passage opens into an oval-shaped room that must be almost two Nubari in diameter. Moss hangs thick here and there, almost obscuring a hole in the floor. A curtain of moss is brushed aside and you see a shadow moving toward you. Away from the moss, its form is clear. It is a large snake. The creature rears back and shows its fangs.

The creature is the Ancient One's guardian. It is a giant bushmaster. Determine what the heroes are doing. Any show of force, such as brandishing a weapon or attacking, will cause the snake to spit its venom, as a cobra can.

If the heroes do not attack, the snake will simply watch them for a time. It will not let them continue farther into the tree, which is accessed through the hole mentioned in the players' text, unless they leave all of their weapons here.

Giant Bushmaster (1): INT semi-; AL N; AC 5; MV 12; HD 8; hp 58; THAC0 13; #AT 1 or special; Dmg 2d4+2; SA Poison--with bite or spit; SD Nil; MR Nil; S H (20' long); ML 18 (fanatic)

"The bushmaster strikes quickly and without warning, imposing a -4 to surprise checks and +4 to all initiative rolls. The snake has a reach of nearly half its body length, allowing it to strike victims that may believe themselves to be out of reach. Because of the viper's extremely long fangs and the ability to deliver massive doses of venom, encounters with it are often fatal. Victims of the poison must immediately save vs. poison at -2, and even those who make their save suffer ill effects. The venom of the bushmaster is hemotoxic, attacking body tissues and the blood of the victim. Victims failing their saving throws experience intense pain around the bite, followed by numbness in the area, swelling, and severe discoloration. For 1-3 turns after the bite, the victim drifts in and out of consciousness, feverish and vomiting when conscious. Should a victim be lucky enough to make an initial save, he is not yet safe. Over a period of 1-4 hours, the victim suffers from weakness, fainting, sweating, thirst, high fever, and terrible nausea."

For this tournament, those who make their saving throw vs. the bushmaster's poison are immediately

brought to one-quarter of their current hit points and suffer a -1 penalty on their combat rolls until 1-4 hours pass or a *neutralize poison* spell is cast on them. Those who fail their saving throw are reduced to 1d4 hit points and suffer a -3 penalty on combat rolls until 1-4 hours pass or a *neutralize poison* spell is cast on them.

If the heroes attack the bushmaster, he fights to the death, as he fears they will then go after the Black Mother. If the combat lasts more than four rounds, the Black Mother will hear the struggle and will arrive in an additional two rounds. She attempts to kill those who attacked the bushmaster. Any fleeing heroes are attacked by the Tree of Life.

If a hero prevents one of his fellows from attacking the bushmaster, such as by putting himself in the field of fire to protect the snake, consider awarding him a hero point.

The bushmaster understands Nubari and Saru. It cannot speak either of those tongues. However, a hero who casts *speak with animals* or eats one of Matula's berries can converse with the bushmaster.

The bushmaster can reveal the following:

- She who is called the Earth Queen, the Black Mother, the Snake Charmer, is deep inside the tree. It is her home and sanctuary. She welcomes all visitors who show her proper homage and respect--and who do nothing to hurt the tree.
- She once was a Nubari, and she can take the form of any animal she chooses. She often selects the most magnificent form in all the jungle--that of a snake.
- The Black Mother is powerful and able to perform mystical feats.
- She is fond of all animals and protects those who are within a short crawl of either side of the Stream of Shadows and who fall within the shade of The Great Tree of Life.
- She is most knowledgeable about reptiles, particularly snakes.
- Those who wish to see her must not take weapons below.

The bushmaster can provide no additional information. However, he can point the way to the hole that leads to the next level inside the tree.

Scale-Filled Pool

When the heroes descend through the hole, tell them it is very steep here. Make climbing checks for them as per the rules in the Dungeon Master Guide. Those who are not successful will fall to the level below and suffer 2d6 points of damage. Heroes who used ropes

make a straight-up Dexterity check. Failure means they fell. However, other heroes must serve as the anchors to those ropes, as there is nothing in the bushmaster's room to tie a rope too.

When the heroes reach the second level, read the following:

It is darker here, like the jungle is just after sunset. Little light filters down, making it difficult to take in your surroundings.

The chamber smells dank, like wet wood, and the floor you stand on is covered with moss.

Stepping forward, you can barely see a gaping black hole at the edge of your vision. Closer is a pool of water, as if rain collected inside the tree. It is tinged dark green, and its surface moves.

The pool is filled with small green tree snakes. Tell any hero who attempts to drink from the pool that there are hundreds of little green snakes, from finger-size to as long as a Nubari's forearm.

If a hero persists and drinks anyway, he discovers the snake leaves him alone. Any wounded hero drinking from the pool is healed 3d4 points of damage. The pool works once per day per individual.

Any heroes who chat with the snakes here via a speak with animals spell or by eating a berry discovers that the Snake Charmer, the Ancient One, the Black Mother, is in the chamber below. It would serve them well to present her with a gift as a greeting. The snakes live here because they like the shadows and the pool, and they are content in the presence of the Great Tree. The snakes have no other useful information. However, the heroes are welcome to talk to them for as long as they like.

When the heroes descend further, read the following:

It is darker, yet, in this chamber. Everything seems a mass of shadows swirling in front of you—a gloomy and eerie collection of dark grays.

You hear a dripping sound, water coming from somewhere, overhead, probably from the pool from the level above. The sound is constant and soft, broken by a shushing noise that is growing louder. Something is coming closer.

A blackness forms amid the grays, a stump of darkness that rises to form a column. The column sways and opens its eyes. In that instant, light fills the chamber, coming from the walls, magically. It reveals the black column—a massive snake the color of slick mud. Its scales are large and shiny, and its eyes are a luminous unblinking yellow.

Determine what the heroes do. The snake, a giant black mamba, is the Black Mother, the Ancient One. If the heroes attack her, she retaliates against only those who struck out. Then she orders everyone from her tree. She presses the attack if they do not leave. This will essentially end the tournament, and the heroes will have to return to Matula the saru shaman. It is possible for the heroes to kill the Black Mother, which also will end the tournament. However, when it appears the heroes are getting the best of such a battle, the bushmaster, if alive, will join in on the fight. And the Great Tree of Life will strike at them as they leave.

Giant Black Mamba, the Black Mother (1): INT genius-; AL N (good tendencies); AC 3; MV 12; HD 15; hp 95; THAC0 5; #AT 1 or special; Dmg 4d4+2 (bite) or constrict for 2d6 per round; SA Poison—with bite, save or have STR reduced to 3, constriction—successful bend bars roll to escape; SD Nil; MR Nil; S H (30' long); ML 18 (fanatic)

Innate abilities, each of which can be used three times a day: *speak with animals, ESP, invisibility to animals, pass without trace, stone shape, meld into stone, tree, cure light wounds, neutralize poison, polymorph self*

If the heroes do not attack, she'll talk to them. Read or paraphrase the following:

"Guests into the Tree of Life," the snake observes. It speaks Nubari, in a sultry feminine voice. "I welcome you. I am the Ancient One, called Black Mother. What brings you to me?"

The Black Mother will give preferential treatment to any snake and reptilian katangas. Next, she favors river tam'hi. If these races are not present, she will address everyone equally. If the heroes offer the Black Mother with a gift, she seems instantly friendlier.

The Black Mother is quick to notice the hero who was bitten. And she is willing to inspect the wound if the heroes ask. She makes hissing noises and sways back and forth, closes her eyes, and appears deep in thought as she hovers around the injured hero. Eventually, she opens her eyes.

"It is a potent venom," she begins. "But you know that, else you would not be here. You seek a creature like the one that bit you so a cure can be concocted. That is wise, for it is doubtful Matula's efforts to stave off the poison were successful. I still sense the venom inside you.

"What you seek is not a snake, though it has the fangs of one. What you look for has four legs

and a tail, is a reptile, one of the blessed ones of Malatra. Kill it not, for that would anger me. These reptiles are few and should be protected. Instead, take one of its eggs. It will do as well. It will do much better.

"I know that one of these reptiles lives not far from here, along a rock-spattered ridge that you could reach shortly before sunset. I will tell you precisely how to find the place. And when you get there, be careful, the ridge is temperamental, not at all easy to climb.

"Now, listen to what I'm about to say very carefully. The reptile has rough, scaly skin, and it has four toes. It is not quite so long as a Nubari's leg, and it is relatively fast. You will be putting yourself in danger to get this close to see these features. But that is the chance you will have to take if you want to save your friend. Remember that I favor this beast. And I do not want you to slay it. In Malatra, you should only kill in defense or for food, and if you approach this matter with some amount of wisdom, you should not need to defend yourself from this fellow.

"It lays its eggs in a depression of earth that it keeps moist. It often, though not always, rings the nest with small stones. The reptile is fiercely protective of its nest. So it is unlikely that you would find the nest unattended.

"Make sure you protect the egg once you have acquired it, as its shell is rather fragile and could easily break. Matula will be able to fashion a cure once you have brought him the egg."

If the heroes gave the Black Mother a gift, and that was the sketch of the tree her friend Matula drew, she offers to fashion the cure herself once the heroes return with the egg. See the conclusion for this alternate ending.

- The Black Mother will also provide the following information, if the heroes ask:
- The area around the ridge is home to many creatures, most of them harmless, some of them venomous.
- She has lived inside the Great Tree of Life for the past few decades. She and the tree are soul-mates and cannot stand to be parted for long.
- At one time she was a Nubari. However, she used various mixtures and underwent an ancient ritual which made her part of the jungle. She has no regrets of leaving her human form. Instead, she can shapechange into practically any animal she desires.
- She met Matula a long time ago. He'd been bitten by a bushmaster, the one in the chamber above.

She saved the saru and befriended the snake. Both have an appreciation for each other now.

- She instructs the heroes to ask Matula to come visit her. It has been too long since she spoke with her old friend.

When the heroes have finished with their questions, she encourages them to leave.

"Time is slipping through your hands," she says. "Your friend could die if you do not hurry."

She provides precise directions to the ridge. The heroes can easily find it. If they seem hesitant, the Black Mother offers to send one of the little green snakes from the chamber above along as a guide.

Toward the Ridge

It's time the heroes had a rousing battle, something to get their adrenalin pumping and something to let their players roll dice about.

You leave the tree and follow the Black Mother's directions, striking out toward the rock-spattered ridge. Within moments, you lose sight of the Great Tree and the Stream of Shadows and find yourselves surrounded by the embrace of the thick foliage.

Light spills down through the canopy, making your trip easy. An hour passes quickly. It should not take you too long to reach this ridge. With luck, you'll find an egg and be back at the Stream by nightfall.

Have the heroes roll for surprise. On a 1-5, they are surprised because the band of bullywugs about to attack them were well camouflaged.

The bullywugs saw them leave the Great Tree of Life and waited until they were beyond the tree's and the Black Mother's protection. They suspect the heroes have lots of wonderful trinkets and juicy things to eat. They intend to rob the heroes, killing them if necessary to get their possessions.

Increase the number of bullywugs to 14, 20, 26, or 30 based on the hit dice and toughness of the heroes. The bullywugs are not stupid. If more than half of them fall, the rest try to retreat.

Bullywugs (9): INT average; AL CE; AC 6; MV 3, Sw 15; HD 2; hp 14 each; THAC0 18; #AT 3; Dmg 1-2/1-2/1d4+1; SA Hop; SD Camouflage; MR Nil; S M (4' tall); ML 10 (average)

From the Monstrous Compendium: "Bullywugs always attack in groups, trying to use their numbers to

surround their enemies. Whenever they can, bullywugs attack with their hop, which can be up to 30 feet forward and 15 upward. When attacking with a hop, bullywugs add a +1 bonus to their attack (not damage) rolls.”

If the heroes search the bodies after the battle, they find crude feathered necklaces, beaded bracelets, and twine belts on most of the creatures. However, they find a fine wooden necklace with carvings of lions’ heads on it. There is a certificate for this necklace. If the heroes talk to any captured bullywugs (the bullywugs know a little Nubari), they can learn the bullywugs are basically bullies, waylaying travelers in an effort to find trinkets and good food.

The heroes reach the ridge about two hours before sunset.

The Rock-Spattered Ridge

At last you reach the rock-spattered ridge that the Black Mother spoke of. The ridge cuts through a section of trees, like a scar on a warrior’s face. It stretches nearly three Nubari tall and at least a dozen Nubari wide. Small lizards scabble along its surface and disappear into crevices.

The reptile the heroes are looking for makes its home along the top of the ridge. Flying heroes can easily reach the top of the ridge. Those not so gifted will have to climb—and that won’t be an easy proposition.

Like the Great Tree, the Rock-Spattered Ridge is alive. It is a giant galeb duhr who long ago found its way to Malatra and decided to stay. The galeb duhr enjoys the presence of all the little animals—their claws feel good against his rocky skin—and does not take kindly to humans and demihumans climbing him to reach his friends.

- Any hero attempting to climb the ridge will discover that as soon as he gets about five feet up, all hand- and footholds disappear, and he’s on slick, flat rock. Said climber falls and suffers 1d6 points of damage.
- Heroes can use ropes to catch onto a craggy piece toward the top and use it to climb. However, after they ascend about five or so feet, they discover that what they’ve attached their ropes to has disappeared. They fall and suffer 1d6 damage.
- Smart heroes might try to use treelimb to get up the ridge, leaning them against the rocks and climbing up. This works for a few feet. Then the

treelimb falls, pushed away by the rock, and the falling hero suffers 1d6 points of damage.

- Heroes who try to chat with the little lizards who crawl over the ridge learn that the rock doesn’t seem to like two-leggers. The rock likes reptiles the best! Persistent questioning reveals that the rock is alive.
- Heroes who attempt to talk to the rock, hear growls and scraping sounds. This is the galeb duhr trying to speak back. The rock talks very, very slow . . . drawing out each syl-la-ble and making any conversation tedious. It’s like a movie in ultra-slow motion.

The heroes must either find a very clever way to get to the top of the ridge—and stay on, as the galeb duhr can form rocky arms and throw them off, or they must convince the rock that their intentions are good. The latter option is much easier.

Heroes who were able to fly to the top of the ridge, without the galeb duhr’s permission, must be clever to get some eggs, as the galeb duhr will swat them away with rocky arms. Let cleverness succeed, but do not reward a straightforward approach.

The galeb duhr will allow the heroes to climb him, even going so far as to make hand- and footholds for them, if they reveal that one of their fellows has been poisoned by a reptile—like one that supposedly lives on the ridge, and that they need an egg to create a cure. Too, they must promise not to kill any of the inhabitants of the ridge, as the little lizards and frogs are friends of the galeb duhr’s, and he couldn’t stand any of them dying. He’d have to retaliate. He informs the heroes that he will hurt any of them who hurt the little creatures that crawl upon him. And he will kill any hero who kills his little friends. Of course, it is possible the heroes could kill the galeb duhr.

Griiu, Ancient Galeb Duhr (1): INT very; AL N; AC -2; MV 6; HD 20; hp 160; THAC0 5; #AT 2; Dmg 2-24 (if it wants to cause damage); SA animate boulders; SD spell-like abilities; MR 20%; S G (26’ tall, 60’ wide); ML 20 (fanatic)

He has the following abilities, useable once a day as a 20th-level mage: *stone shape*, *move earth*, *passwall*, *transmute rock to mud*, and *wall of stone*. He can *stoneshape* at will.

After the heroes have found a way to the top of the ridge, they can search around for the reptile and the nest of eggs. Read or paraphrase the following:

You reach the top of the living ridge and discover all manners of little lizards scampering

about. Some are brown, the color of the stone. Others have stubby legs, wide bodies, and are the shade of dried mud. There are curly-tailed lizards that curiously run about your feet. They look up at you and flick their tiny tongues.

There are a few larger lizards. One is roughly as long as a shu is tall. It has a massive head, small legs, and short tail. It has bead-like scales that make gaudy patterns across its body, and unlike a snake's scales, this lizard's scales do not overlap. There is another larger lizard nearby also. It is a dark grayish-brown and has warty skin. Shorter than the beaded-scaled lizard, it has a very long tail.

There are beautiful frogs on this ridge. They are orange and black, purple, and vibrant greens. They crowd at the edges of water that has gathered in depressions.

Determine what the heroes are doing. The lizard they want is the newt, the rough-skinned one. However, they will not know this until they are practically on top of the lizards—and if they remember that the Black Mother said the lizard they seek has four toes.

If the galeb duhr is alive, a hero who injures one of the reptiles will get swatted off the ridge and suffer 2d6 points of falling damage. A hero who kills one of the reptiles will be attacked by limbs of the galeb duhr. Griiu will not press an attack once it looks like a hero is unconscious.

If any of the heroes have berries left and try to talk to the lizards, they learn that the lizards like the living ridge.

The lizards and frogs are more than happy to talk about the ridge, the weather, the juicy insects, and other such nonsense. They have no useful information for the heroes. However, if the heroes ask if any of the lizards or frogs are venomous, the creatures respond that they all are.

The little lizards: there are several varieties. All are quick, agile, and non-threatening. They scamper away if the heroes menace them. The heroes can easily kill the lizards if they want to.

The frogs: these tiny fellows are colorful and have rich, throaty croaks. They are not afraid of the heroes, and they will not hop away unless a hero seriously threatens them. However, the frogs could pose a threat. See the following:

Poisonous frogs (36): INT animal; AL N; AC 8; MV 3, hop 3; HD 1-1; hp 2; THAC0 20; #AT Nil; Dmg Nil;

SA Poison; SD Nil; MR Nil; S T (2" long); ML 10 (average)

These frogs are brightly colored, with streaks of pink, yellow, green, red, or orange. The following is excerpted from Dragon Magazine #237: "Frogs pass on their poison to others through touch, most likely someone steps on one with bare feet or picks one up because it looks 'pretty.' Its poison glands are found on either side of its head, and when the frog feels threatened, it secretes a creamy substance from its skin. Anyone touching a poisonous frog must make a saving throw vs. poison for every round they remain in contact with the creature. If there is an open wound in the general area, there is a cumulative penalty of -2. The venom of poisonous frogs is both cardiotoxic and neurotoxic, containing a variety of chemicals that affect the nervous system in different ways. If a saving throw is successful, it means the poison was not absorbed into the victim's system that round. Failing the poison save means the toxin has been absorbed into the bloodstream in some measure. If the poison was not introduced into an open wound, the victim suffers from nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and inflammation of the area." If the venom is introduced into the blood, via a cut, the toxin causes paralysis for 2d6 rounds, severe convulsions, and inflicts 2d6 points of damage.

The beaded lizard: It is lairing on a nest under the shade of a rocky outcropping. Though sluggish during the day, the lizard is protective of its nest. If the heroes approach this lizard to within three yards, it rises on its stubby legs, flicks its tail and hisses. The lizard is on a nest of five dull yellow-tinted eggs. The lizard will attack any hero coming within two yards of the nest.

If the heroes ask about the lizard's teeth, tell them they see a row of tiny teeth, with two in front and on top being longer, like fangs. If they ask about its feet, tell them the lizard has five clawed toes.

The heroes will have to either kill the beaded lizard, capture it in a net, or find a way to lure it away from the nest if they want to grab any eggs. Use your judgment on what they attempt. If the heroes get close enough to the lizard, it will fight them.

Gila Monster (1): INT animal; AL N; AC 8 day / 4 night; MV 6 day / 9 night; HD 2+3; hp 19; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1; SA Latching bite, poison which inflicts damage equal to one-fourth of the victim's current hit points, rounded up; SD Nil; MR Nil; S S (3' long); ML 9 (average)

This is one of the few poisonous lizards that can be found in Malatra. It is a slow creature with a painful bite. It is strong for its size. The Gila monster is noted for its massive head, small legs, and short tail. It has bead-like scales that

make gaudy patterns across its body. Unlike a snake's scales, the lizard's scales do not overlap. The following is excerpted from Dragon Magazine #237:

"The jaws of the Gila monster are extremely strong, and it can hold its tight grip for up to 15 minutes. An Open Doors roll is needed to remove the creature—or its death. The Gila monster has 35 poisonous teeth that it uses to introduce lethal doses of venom. The teeth are not hollow, but grooved. Venom flows from sacks in the mouth, down the grooves, and into the victim.

"The longer the Gila monster is attached, the more chance there is for a victim to become poisoned. Following an initial saving throw vs. poison a penalty of -1 is applied for every round the Gila monster remains attached, saving each round as more venom is introduced. The poison of the Gila monster is hemotoxic, elevating the victim's blood pressure.

"Failing a saving throw means the venom has entered the bloodstream, causing extreme pain followed by sweating, vomiting, swelling, and an unbearable ringing in the ears. . . . The creature is shy by nature, and does not attack humanoid creatures unless provoked. They seek shelter under rocks or in small burrows, which it often takes over from other animals. Gila monsters are nocturnal and are sluggish during the day."

It is possible the heroes might take the Gila monster's egg(s) and leave, believing they have the right eggs. This will be addressed in the conclusion.

The rough-skinned lizard: As the heroes get closer, they see there are two lizards, big newts actually, guarding a nest of eggs. The nest consists of a ring of rocks shaded by a rocky overhang. There are four eggs, pale blue-gray in color.

If the heroes get two within three yards, one newt comes off the nest and hisses at them. It will attack if the heroes come closer. The other newt will remain on the nest to defend the eggs. If the heroes ask about the newt's teeth, tell them they have tiny teeth, with two larger upper teeth, like fangs. If they ask about the feet, tell them the newts have four toes.

The heroes will have to come up with a clever means to get the newts off the eggs, perhaps via spells or netting them or luring them away. Use your judgment on what you think will work. If the heroes physically injure a newt, the galeb duhr will swat the offending hero off the ridge. If a hero kills a newt, the galeb duhr will strike at the hero to cause damage, stopping its attack when the hero is either unconscious or off the ridge.

Rough-skinned newt (2): INT animal; AL N; AC 7; MV 3; HD 1-1; hp 4 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg Nil;

SA Poison—save or die in 1-4+1 days; SD Nil; MR Nil; S S (2' long); ML 9 (average)

This newt is often mistaken for a salamander, lizard, or other non-dangerous creature. It has warty skin, four toes, and a tail that is longer than its body.

It can regenerate amputated legs, tails, and portions of its head, though not if its brain is bashed in. The following is excerpted from Dragon Magazine #237:

"What makes the newt dangerous is its touch. The creature's embryos, skin, and eggs contain a powerful poison. The poison is tetrodotoxic, a contact poison that acts on the nervous system of the victim to prevent nerve cell functions. The poison is a milky substance secreted in the tail region. One newt contains enough poison to kill a grown man—unless he makes a saving throw vs. poison.

"Failing a save against the newt's poison causes numbness and weakness throughout the body. Unconsciousness occurs 1-2 rounds later, with death occurring in 1-4 turns (1-4+1 days for the purpose of this tournament). There is no known natural antidote to this poison (making the herbalism proficiency useless against it); it is curable only by magic."

Note whether a hero fails his save against a newt's poison. They can be cured if they take an egg to the saru shaman, or to the Black Mother. Too, if they do not get an egg, the saru shaman will be able to cure them anyway. No use killing a perfectly good hero over a newt.

Obtaining an Egg

Once the heroes have gained one or more eggs, about the size of a lime, (and please note how many they took), they'll have to find a way to carry it. The best option is to pad it and carry it in something soft.

Heroes who simply carry it in their hand should have to make periodic Dexterity checks to see if they slip and drop it—prompting a return to the ridge for another egg.

If the heroes breezed through the tournament, which is a good bet if they did not role play much, and too much time is remaining, throw this combat at them as they are heading back toward the Great Tree or Matula the saru shaman.

heroes who are alert, observant, or intently watching their surroundings as they travel will notice burned patches along the bases of a few trees. This might alert them to danger.

Attack of the Fire Toads

The creatures doing the burning are fire toads, and they will hop out to attack the heroes, thinking them a nice, tasty meal. If the heroes were alert to danger, give them a +1 or +2 bonus on their chance not to be surprised by the toads. Otherwise, the toads gain a +1 to surprise the heroes.

Use either 3, 6, or 9 fire toads depending on the toughness of the heroes. If the heroes are especially hardy, increase the toads' hit points. If the heroes are very low level, do not have all of the toads breathe fire, and have those that do spread out their fire among multiple heroes, never concentrating on one.

Worry the hero carrying the egg. If that hero fails a saving throw vs. the toads' fire, have him make a saving throw for the egg. The shell is rather leathery, and it would save as if it were a potion vial. If the egg breaks, the heroes will have to go get another one. If the hero is carrying multiple eggs, each egg gets a separate saving throw. Apply any reasonable bonuses to a saving throw depending on how the egg was padded.

If the hero carrying an egg falls to the ground during the toad attack, the egg must make a saving throw vs. crushing blow, with a +1 to +4 bonus depending on how the egg was packed.

Fire toads (3, 6, or 9): INT low; AL CN; AC 10; MV 6, hop 6; HD 4+1; hp 27 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg Variable; SA Fire breath; SD Nil; MR Nil; S M (4' long); ML 9 (average)

From the Monstrous Compendium: "These large, red toads are about four feet long and covered with rough, purple warts. Fire toads shun water, preferring drier surroundings. Fire toads are so named because of their ability to exhale small fireballs. These fireballs are their only form of attack; a single fireball can travel up to 30 feet and has a blast radius of five feet. Damage is equal to 2-16 points, half that if a saving throw vs. spell is made. Fire toads subtract 1 point of damage on all dice for fire-based attacks against them, but cold- or water-based attacks inflict an additional point of damage per die. Throwing liquid—even water—at a fire toad will cause it to retreat, though it will immediately breathe twice at its assailant in the round of its retreat."

A hero who attempts to take the brunt of a fireball to protect the hero carrying the egg might be worthy of a Hero Point.

There is nothing valuable about the toads. However, their meat is edible and fairly tasty.

Conclusion

When the heroes have dealt with the toads, they can finish the tournament. There are several options for wrapping things up, and these are covered here.

Having the wrong egg: If the heroes took the wrong lizard's eggs, either the Black Mother or Matula will tell them these are not correct. However, while they were gone, the Black Mother or Matula was able to fashion a workable cure. The envenomed heroes will not die. Yet, if the heroes breezed through the tournament, and enough time remains, let them return to the ridge to collect the correct eggs.

Having no egg: If the heroes were not able to collect any eggs (perhaps because they were swatted away by the galeb duhr or because the eggs broke), either the Black Mother or Matula informs them that while they were away a cure was concocted. Any poisoned heroes are healed. However, there is no bonus treasure, as there are no newt eggs.

Returning to the Black Mother: If the heroes gave the Black Mother the sketch of the tree and she agreed to concoct a cure with the egg, the heroes are told to sit outside the Great Tree while she finishes her preparations. The Black Mother lectures them to respect the small creatures of the jungle which are made powerful because of their venom. She asks them to describe the creatures they saw and explain how they interacted with the creatures. This can be drawn out into a role-playing encounter if there is enough time. Then she eventually provides the cure. Go to "The Reward."

Seeking out Matula: If the heroes return to Matula with the correct egg, he makes a great show of brewing a horrid-smelling mixture that practically makes all the heroes sick just from getting a whiff. He tells them how fortunate they were to have met the Ancient One and to have received the gift of her wisdom—the knowledge of what poisoned their friend. When he is finished with his lecture, he presents the cure to any poisoned heroes and tells them they barely made it back in time. If there is time remaining in the tournament, he quizzes each hero about his or her perceptions of the Black Mother. He is especially curious about the Great Tree. When the heroes are finished talking, go to "The Reward."

The Reward

If the heroes collected eggs, they get a reward.

"It seems I have a little more of this brew," Matula (or the Black Mother) says. "I have three doses, which I've carefully sealed in these gourds. I give them to you in the event that you find yourselves envenomed again. They should cleanse you of the poison from any reptile in our blessed jungle.

"Remember to treat the reptiles of Malatra with respect. Remember to give those that can harm you a wide path and treat them with a reasonable amount of caution. Embrace those that cannot harm you and mean only kindness. You can learn much from the scaly ones.

"Remember, too, that the Great Tree of Life knows each of you. This is an honor you should not take lightly. If you are truly blessed, your travels will take you to the tree--and the Black Mother--once more."

The End

Venom Experience Points

Talking to animals along the Stream of

Shadows:	100 xp
Not attacking the Great Tree of Life:	100 xp
Voluntarily gifting the Great Tree of Life:	100 xp
Deafeating the ambushing bullywugs:	200 xp
Not attacking the reptiles on the ridge:	100 xp
Obtaining only one egg, from the newt:	500 xp

OR

Obtaining any number of eggs	200 xp
Defeating the fire toads (optional encounter):	200 xp

Discretionary roleplaying award	0-500 xp
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Total experience points possible:	1,800 xp
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aware of what the leaves can do. There are certificates for the leaves

Note that a hero cannot gain both a piece of bark and a leaf.

Possible Treasure

- Lion head necklace from a bullywug
- Three doses of *neutralize any reptile poison* concoction
- Bark from the Great Tree of Life for sarus and monkey katangas only (five extra permanent hit points.)
- Leaves from the Great Tree for all other races. Heroes who wear a leaf ignore the first 12 points of damage inflicted on them by a hostile plant. Once the leaves absorb the damage, they crumble and are useless. The heroes are immediately

Venom, player handout

