

Cursed

By Ryan Conrad

With thanks to Christopher Reed for letting me finish his trilogy,
and to the late Steve Jay for the inside scoop on the origin of the Shu.

For home play and convention use only, not for retail

(Note: This adventure uses the 3.5 ruleset, but could be played using the 3.0 rules as presented in the Jungle Book of Malatra with very little difference. It is intended for all level of play, though higher levels of play may need to upwardly adjust a few of the numbers of encountered creatures, their stats and levels, or DCs of challenges to compensate.)

It has been about a month since the events of “Madness”, where wicked Jungle Doppelgangers tricked the Jengi Shu tribe into believing that the taboo against Shu killing Shu had been broken. This can only mean that Malatra will soon end. It was hoped by the forces of Tiger that taboo breaking would lead the various Shu tribes going to war against each other. But this was not the case. In fact, in all that time there were no further reports of Shu killing other Shu at all. To a one, each Shu tribe that heard of the breaking of the Taboo, withdrew in shame to their own lands sending word to other tribes that they would no longer be involved in the affairs of Malatra, and warned visitors to stay away on pain of death. Only other Shu, if they are brave enough to try to enter foreign territory, are spared this fate, instead being captured and released at the edge of their territory.

This self-imposed exile the Shu tribes had adopted was not what the forces of Tiger had wanted, but it worked well-enough for them. Unfortunately, the wicked forces have since discovered that they need the help of the Shu tribe of the Jengi.

In ancient days, the wise Shu called Chuk’aa (who created the taboo against Shu killing other Shu) retrieved something of great value from the Tamara during their last invasion. This artifact, called the Cup of the Brood Mother, is the only thing the Tamara knew of that could allow them to reproduce.

It was also the source of the creation of the Jungle Doppelgangers. Chuk’aa is believed to have hidden the Cup somewhere within the tribal lands which now belong to the Jengi. Legend has it, that he placed powerful guardians and traps that only Shu working with other peoples of Malatra would be able to bypass. So, the wicked forces realized that they needed to somehow trick the Shu into doing the work for them.

The heroes are hanging out in the Village of the Saiyama, playing a game called Gangaton.

A traveling Saru (actually a Jungle Doppelganger) tells them a story of a wonderous device called the Cup of the Brood Mother, which was said to be able to cleanse all curses from broken taboos. He suggests that it be used to free the Shu from their curse, and thus save all of Malatra! The shu alone cannot retrieve this device, and so they ask for assistance of many heroes.

Ffft, on the Council of Elders, sends the heroes. They travel 8 days to reach the Jengi village, then must convince the elders of the Jengi to allow them to search for the Cup. The Jungle Doppelgangers, in the form of the fake Saru, help direct the heroes to a fortified Jungle abode where they believe the cup has been hidden.

It turns out, it is NOT the hiding place of Cup, but of Chuk’aa himself who still survives as a hermit and whose powerful protections have kept the agents of Tiger such as the Jungle Doppelgangers away.

The heroes learn the origin of the Shu race and of the existence of the Jungle Doppelganger, as well as their origin. When they kill the Jungle Doppelganger with them, they will learn of the trick. He explains that the Cup is not able to remove

curses, but a powerful evil device which could allow the Tamara to breed. He also tells them that the Jengi are not cursed anyway, since no Taboo has been broken, but that the danger of that happening still exists as one Shu is still their prisoner. The Shu called Buster has been kept alive so he could be mind controlled and used to truly break the taboo.

Chuk'aa tells the heroes that Buster is being kept in the cave that many Jungle Doppelgangers call home, more than a day to the southeast. He tells the heroes that they must rescue him, which will not only save his life but be proof to the Jengi as well as all of Malatra that the taboo remains. He gives the heroes an artifact called the Eye of the Tiger, which will blind the forces of evil to their movements. They must sneak in and save Buster.

A month has been relatively quiet. In fact, little has been seen of any of the forces of Tiger since they arrived in Malatra last year. It is currently a quiet morning in the village of the Saiyama. Several villagers have taken the time to relax from worrying about the threat of Tiger and set up a group of Gangaton Poles. Once everything is set up, they ask if you wish to participate in their game.

Game rules for Gangaton (knock the melon from the top of the pole, first one to do so wins)

A melon sits on a spike in a 30' high pole that has been oiled so that it cannot be climbed. Twenty-five other poles surround it at varying heights, starting at 5' high and 25' feet away from the melon pole and raised up by 5' for each 5' closer to the center pole. Players take turns climbing a pole of their choice or leaping from one pole to the next, in order to get closer to the

melon (DC 10 to jump from pole to pole). Any failure to leap will result in falling to the ground and a loss for that player. The object is to somehow grab the melon and make it back to the ground without falling. Since it is on a spike and the central pole has no place to stand on, this may require some tumbling (DC 25) over the central pole or grabbing it at the end of a jump. If the melon is broken for any reason (DC 5 to inadvertently break the melon when interacting with it), the player who broke the melon loses and the next player in turn order wins. The poles are only half a foot in diameter. Magic cannot be used in this game, but technology or innovative techniques can. One success story came many seasons ago, when the Shu called Jumanga grabbed the feet of a Lacerial Flyer friend and used that to reach and retrieve the melon safely on his very first turn. Since then, flyers have been banned from the game.

Four other contestants play the game. If no one is able to retrieve the melon by turn 5, a Saru will successfully do so after using his legs to hold the nearby pole and grabbing the melon from the center pole with his long arms.

As you watch a second round of the game, you hear footsteps approaching. You look up to see an elderly Saru leaning on a walking stick and heading towards you, a sly gleam in his eye. The Saru bows deeply as he approaches you.

"Greetings," he says in a smooth, silky voice. "My name is Gi. I have heard of your great feats as heroes, and I come to ask for your aid in a most important matter."

You gather around Gi, eager to hear what he has to say. The Saru begins to speak, "There is an artifact called The Cup of

the Brood Mother, which is said to possess the power to cleanse all curses and taboos. I believe this artifact may be the only thing that can reverse the curse upon the Shu and all of Malatra that comes from their breaking the taboo against killing one another."

"Unfortunately, this cup is hidden in the Lands, that are home of the Jengi Shu tribe. In a place called the Tree of the Ancestors. I would have gone to search for the artifact alone," Gi pauses for a second, but eventually continues, "but the myths say the tree can only be found by a Shu and the Cup can only be retrieved by Shu working with heroes of other races. With the recent isolationist stance, the tribe has taken, I cannot do it alone. Will you help me?"

The heroes are able to reply in any way they feel appropriate. If they ask more questions, Gi will deflect most of them saying that he put together the story of the Cup and its probable location being the Jengi Tribe from the tales and stories gleaned from many tribes throughout Malatra. If they ask about the curse upon the Shu or Jengi, Gi will tell the story of Why The Shu Must Not Kill Each Other from below, as well as a recap of the known and pertinent parts of the adventure Madness. Any specifics about what the heroes would have to do will be saved until after they agree to help. He offers no reward, as he says saving Malatra should be reward enough.

If the heroes agree to help, Gi continues; "The search for the cup will be a difficult one. The Jengi are the only ones who can help us, as they are the guardians of their own lands and may not want us there. Therefore, we should approach them and ask for permission, and we will likely need their help as well. But it is doubtful

that they will help us unless we can prove ourselves to be worthy and earn their trust."

Gi will leave with the heroes as soon as they are ready, but he grows somewhat impatient if they waste too much time. If the heroes wish to speak to someone in authority, they learn that the Council of Elders plus Chief Reesta and Mirmirani has gone on a secret retreat in preparation for next month's Council of Tribes meeting which will be held in the village of the Oscray. For some reason, only Ffft was left behind, (he claims they gave him the wrong meeting place). Ffft will hear the story and tell the heroes they should go with the Saru to find the Cup of the Brood Mother so as to free the Shu from their curse.

Encounter One: Tribal Fight

The trip to the Jengi lands takes about 8 days in total. Through much of this, the heroes' journey will be uneventful though they will be forced to detour around a few mudslides that are indicative of the approaching onset of the Rainy Season. On the fourth day, they have their first real encounter with danger.

The humid air is heavy and weighs down upon you as the sounds of the wildlife fill your ears while you walk. You are resting for a few minutes in a particularly dense thicket when you suddenly feel a sense of unease. Moments later, a group of strange creatures with green scaly skin and sharp claws emerge from the foliage. It's a group of tasloi, the small reptilian humanoids that are known for their ferocity in battle and are servants of Tiger! Once nearly extinct in the jungle,

their numbers have exploded in recent months.

There are two tasloi for each hero. They are armed with crude spears and daggers, and they wear ragged loincloths made from animal hides. They bear down on the heroes with fierce determination, seeing them as intruders in their territory.

Tasloi Warrior: Small humanoid (tasloi), Chaotic Evil HD: 2d8 (9 HP) Init: +6 Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares) AC: 16 (+1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-2; Attack: Spear +3 melee (1d6-1) Full Attack: Spear +3 melee (1d6-1) or dagger +3 melee (1d4-1) Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft. SA: Sneak attack +1d6 SQ: Scent Saves: Fort +0, Ref +5, Will +1 Abilities: Str 8, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 6 Skills: Hide +12, Move Silently +8, Spot +3 Feats: Improved Initiative

Gi will not participate in combat and does not count toward the total number of heroes, he will attempt to hide but due to his advance age he will move slowly to do so.

Encounter Two: (OGE)

It is two days after your encounter with the Tasloi and you are traveling through the thick jungle. Your senses are alert to the sounds and sights of the wilds around you, even so, as you round a bend in the path, you see a pack of velociraptors is feasting on the remains of a small herd of deer. The raptors turn their heads towards you, their eyes gleaming with predatory intelligence. You realize with a start that you are intruding on their meal and might become their next one because of it. They move with a grace and fluidity that is both beautiful and terrifying. As you watch, they begin to close in on you, their sharp teeth and talons at the ready.

You seemingly have no choice but to fight for your lives.

There is one raptor for each hero unless the party has more than six heroes, at which point add two raptors for each additional hero. If the heroes flee, the raptors will give chase. If, however, they attempt to scare the garuda or otherwise deter them, a DC 15 Intimidate will cause them to flee. The raptors don't really want a fight though and will flee if more than half their number are killed. As before, Gi will not participate in combat and does not count toward the total number of heroes, however a raptor may try (always unsuccessfully) to bite at him if given an opportunity.

Raptor Garuda: Small animal, True Neutral HD: 2d8+2 (11 HP), Init: +3 Speed: 60 ft. (12 squares) AC: 15 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +1 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-3; Attack: Talons +3 melee (1d6-1) and bite -2 melee (1d4-1); Full Attack: Talons +3 melee (1d6-1) and bite -2 melee (1d4-1); Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.; SA: Pounce; Saves: Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +2; Abilities: Str 8, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6; Skills: Hide +7, Listen +3, Move Silently +7, Spot +3, Survival +1*; Feats: Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Encounter Three: The Elders

You have reached the lands of the Jengi and are surprised to not have a welcoming committee. The Jengi have never been very open to other races and indeed verge on xenophobia. Not having their patrols greet you at the border of their lands is odd, to say the least. Your feeling of unease only grows as you approach. Eventually, you see their largest and most well-known village, from

which they take their name. It is a group of hallowed out still-standing trees and giant logs arranged in a rough circle. You call out, but there is no answer.

As you cautiously move forward, you are struck by the apparent suddenness of the departure of the Jengi. Several fires still have meals on them cooking. Then you realize, the shu never left! Looking around you, you see you are surrounded by what appears to be their entire tribe, weapons held at the ready. Somehow, they had stealthily surrounded you!

Heroes may try to object, claiming their spot or tracking ability or a feat like Observant would prevent them from being surrounded. Assure them, this is not likely. The Shu's racial ability to hide, their greater familiarity with the terrain, ability to assist each-other, and spells of illusion and concealment by Kumon Obok and other shamen or witchdoctors has taken the heroes off guard.

The Shu do not want to fight, particularly if there are Shu among the heroes. They will order to heroes to leave their lands and not return. They will be very insistent, but if heroes refuse and are unable to convince the Shu that they should be allowed to stay, the Shu will eventually treat them as if they were not there, shunning them in all things but still being careful about speaking in front of them. It will require a DC 15 Persuade or Diplomacy to get the Shu to listen to the heroes. If this happens, Chief Futori comes forward to speak with them.

“Alright, you have convinced me that we should listen to you. Our deepest most sacred taboo has been broken. Even though our shame is great, and you risk sharing it by just being here. Before you explain why you have come, I will explain

to you why it is wrong for you to be here.” Futori says.

Futori will tell the tale of **Why The Shu Must Not Kill Each Other** (read or summarize from the story handout below), and of how the taboo was broken: **“A month ago, two of our warriors went looking for a friendly spirit to help the tribe recover from a strange malady of the mind. One of our own, Buster, was sent to look for them with some heroes. They discovered that one warrior, Blu was dead, seemingly killed by Black Leopard Katanga. The other warrior called; Buster had seemingly been driven mad by his friend's death. When Dexter approached him, Buster killed Dexter. This violated our greatest taboo and Buster himself was killed by a bolt of retribution from the Spirits. His death ensured that the Shu were now cursed. Somehow a Shu would cause the destruction of Malatra. This is why all Shu tribes now have become insular and distanced from the affairs of Malatra including the War with Tiger. We know that any of us attempting to help, might now accidentally cause the destruction of our home, even if inadvertently. This is the curse we live under, and because of your arrival here, you yourselves could easily be the means by which that destruction might happen.”**

The heroes must explain that there is an item that could remove the curse upon the Shu and redeem them from breaking a taboo. Although Futori will be intrigued, he will not commit to helping them unless they mention the Tree of the Ancestors. Gi will mention the Tree, if the heroes forget or otherwise do not think to do so. At which point, he will decide that heroes need to speak to the tribes aged witch doctor Kumon

Ubok, and immediately take them to his hut in the base of a hollowed-out tree.

Once the heroes enter the hut of Kumon Ubok, Futori will tell the witch doctor that the heroes have a request that they think might remove the curse that has befallen the Shu after breaking the taboo. The heroes will need to explain what exactly they want (the Cup of the Brood Mother), where they hope to get it (the Tree of the Ancestors), and what they need from the Shu (a guide and assistance in retrieving the Cup). Gi will be no help in this as he has seemingly fallen asleep as he leans against his walking stick. When all three points have been met, Kumon Ubok will tell Futori that he will take the heroes to the Tree of the Ancestors, and that he should not let any other Shu follow them due to the danger. He will then tell the heroes that they will set out immediately.

Encounter Four: The Two Trials

Kumon Ubak leads you north, into the thickest part of the jungle. You travel with him in silence for the first half hour, then you begin to notice the foliage becoming more sparse at times. Soon, the path you follow has become a trail, though not one made by any animal or garuda. Kumon Ubak speaks to you as you follow him deeper on this trail.

“The path we are on can only be reached by the Shu.” He says. “It leads us to the Tree of the Ancestors, a sacred site for my people. Inside the Tree, we will find what we are looking for. It has long been taboo for any except the Jengi to enter the Tree. But I have waved that for you, as other taboos mean nothing in the wake of our curse. When we arrive, you will be

tested. Since I have been there before I will be permitted entry and await you inside. Your tests will be twofold. One of knowledge and wisdom, one of bravery and cunning. Of the first test all I am permitted to tell you is that you should remember your knowledge of the Ancients. Of the second I will tell you that height is always an advantage. Finally, you will face the Guardian at the End. For this you will have to rely on your combat and magical skills, though removal of these may help you as well.” No sooner has Kumon Ubak finished speaking, then you discover that the path you are on has ended. In front of you, in what appears to be a dome of foliage all around you is the most massive tree you have ever seen. It seems to radiate energy and positivity, and you feel rested and invigorated just by standing near it. Then you notice that the tree appears hollow, with a small entrance just large enough to fit a Nubari if he crawls. You turn to ask Kumon Ubok if this is where you need to go, but find that he is gone.

Kumon Ubok cannot be found anywhere. Investigations of the area will reveal that the tunnel into the tree seems to go deeper than the depth of the tree. The heroes can make whatever preparations they like, but will find that the path behind them has likewise vanished, as if the jungle simply consumed it. Attempts to push through the thicket will be fruitless, they have nowhere else to go except into the Tree. The tunnel is large enough that most races can enter without issue, however if a larger sized creature such as an elderly Plant Man or Hornhead Lacerial attempts to enter, they will find themselves magically shrunk down to medium size. Any Saru witness to this will likely not want to enter the tree afterward.

After crawling about twenty lengths of Nubari, you come to a much taller room. Here you can stand again and notice that the floor is covered in stone tiles, each about the size of a Shu arranged in hexagonal shaped grid. The tiles each have pictographs on them, a quick study and you can identify them. The stones each bear the likeness of one of the races in Malatra. That one is obviously a Butu, another a Kretch, one looks like a Shu, and so on. You get the impression that stepping on the wrong stone could be bad. You have to decide how to proceed.

Trial One: The Stone Walkway

Various pictures of creatures are chiseled onto the stones of a walkway approximately 5 feet away from each other in a hex grid. Heroes can make a Decipher Script (DC 10), a Knowledge Lore (DC 10) or if no one has either of these a Craft (any skill) DC 5 to identify each picture. Stepping on any tile which is unsafe will result in that tile immediately falling away into a seemingly bottomless pit. Heroes must immediately make a Reflex Save DC 15 or they will fall into the chasm. Other heroes can immediately attempt to save them through clever magic or skill use (generally DC 15) but this will be situational and the only chance given. Any hero who falls into the pit does not die but will be ejected from the adventure. They will awaken in their tribe when the adventure concludes with no memory of the past few days and having permanently lost one level. (See the handout and key maps at the end.) Pictures on the stones are:

- 1 **Ancients** This spot is Safe, however anyone stepping on it will be immediately transported to the beginning of the walkway (no save).
- 2 **“Oscray”** (actually Orcs) This is Unsafe
- 3 **Butu** Kobolds This is Unsafe

- 4 **Lacerials** (actually just a close picture of Garuda but heroes will not be able to tell due to the angle) This is Unsafe
- 5 **Kretch** This is Unsafe and any hero stepping on it will be cursed as per Bestow Curse spell (no save) for the remainder off the adventure, unless they step on the tile with their own race on it afterward. (see below)
- 6 **Oni** This is Unsafe
- 7 **Pterrmen** This is Unsafe
- 8 **Black Leopard Katanga** This is Safe
- 9 **Manscorpions** This is Unsafe
- 10 **Troglodytes** This is Unsafe
- 11 **Lizardfolk** This is Unsafe
- 12 **Tabaxi** This is Unsafe
- 13 **Wemics** This is Unsafe
- 14 **Sahuagin** This is Unsafe
- 15 **Tamara** This is Unsafe, however in addition to falling away those standing on it must make a DC 20 Reflex Save or be Enervated as per spell.)
- 16 **Saru** This is Unsafe
- 17 **Jungle Giants** This is Safe
- 18 **Yuan-ti** This is Safe
- 19 **Nubari** This is Safe
- 20 **Aarakocra** This is Unsafe
- 21 **Shu** This is Safe
- 22 **Tiger Katanga** This is Safe
- 23 **Snake Katanga** This is Safe
- 24 **Pangolin Katanga** This is Safe
- 25 **Monkey Katanga** This is Safe
- 26 **Caiman Katanga** This is Safe
- 27 **River Tam’hi** This is Safe
- 28 **Jungle Tam’hi** This is Safe
- 29 **Spider Katanga** This is Safe
- 30 **Hyena Katanga** This is Safe
- 31 **Bakemono** This is Safe
- 32 **Korobokuru** This is Safe
- 33 **Tasloi** This is Unsafe
- 34 **Unknown monster race #1** This is Unsafe
- 35 **Unknown monster race #2** This is Unsafe

The key to the puzzle is that only stones with pictures of the races that the Ancients considered to be their inheritors are allowed to pass. This leads to some contradictions or baffling decisions, such as not including the Saru (who the Ancients initially considered failures), or allowing wicked Spider Katanga (as the Ancients didn't feel any subrace to be inherently evil). Butu did not yet exist, and the Ancients had little respect for their Kobold slaves. Likewise, Orcs were uncommon and not friendly like the Oscrays. Also, any hero stepping on a tile with its own race on it will be healed of all injury. The healing occurs only once per hero regardless of other damage taken.

DM Recommendation: Use sketches of various races to allow the heroes to guess the races out of character. Reward 1 XP to any player who figures out any unrepeated race. Do not penalize for them not guessing correctly. Do this prior to any skill checks to identify the pictures. For the "Unknown monsters" gift the XP reward for any reasonable guess.

Other means of crossing the room: Flight magic will function in the room, but a spell prevents moving ahead and the flyer will find that they can only land on a hex equal to or before wherever they took off from. The same holds true to races that can naturally fly. Any hero can utilize the Climb skill (DC 15 per 5 feet) to move along the outside walls of the chamber to the other side. They could also use the Jump skill (DC 10 each jump), however if they jump on an Unsafe space, they will have to make their Reflex save at a -10. No hero should have access to teleportation, but everywhere within the tree is warded against it anyway. A levitation spell could work, provided someone pushed the levitator (Strength DC 10 to move them 15 feet). Other, creative,

means of crossing the room should of course succeed with the proper skill checks.

Gi will hold back until someone successfully crosses the room with the puzzle. Then he will follow the same route. If no one is able to figure out the puzzle pattern, he will give hints if he is able in order to assist them.

Trial Two: The Leap of Faith

As you make your way from the room with the tiles, the passageway widens once again. Soon it opens up into a tall room with a stone ground bisected by a massive 30-foot-wide crevasse. At the other end, you see the path continue onward.

If a character falls into the crevasse, they are ejected from the adventure much like in the previous challenge. They will awaken in their tribe when the adventure concludes with no memory of the past few days and having permanently lost one level.

This room has permanent wards against magic use of any kind, and winds from the crevasse will buffet natural flyers halting their progress. Only skills or equipment can help here. Worse, the path forward is not actually real, and those following it will only get 20 feet before having to ascend a rope ladder. The true path forward is directly above the one the heroes can see. It is obscured by the rock face. A jump from the higher, unseen ledge is far easier.

There are many ways heroes could get across this gap. Heroes could tie multiple spears together to create a pole, they could try to use a rope with a hook to swing across, or they could simply jump.

Jump (DC 30) or Balance (DC 10) if using some sort of rope or poles to walk across. If

they get a good secure rope swing, a Vine Swinging (DC 5) will work for them.

If the heroes climb their wall, they will see the gap from higher up is not as wide. A Climb (DC 10) is required to get up there, though this could be lessened with ropes and assistance of others. A Jump (DC 5) is all that is required to get across the gap here. Afterward they can proceed on their way.

Once again, Gi will hold back, mimicking what others do after it has proved successful.

Encounter Five: The Guardian at the End

After the two challenges you are ready. As you enter a chamber that is impossibly large, but empty save for a huge rock, you wonder where this “guardian at the end” might be. Just then the rock moves. It sprouts limbs and turns a glare toward you. It looks like a massive tortoise, but you are sure that it isn’t ‘alive’ in the traditional sense....though it doesn’t reek of decay like the unliving might. With bulbous eyes it moves to attack, as you notice your way back has magically vanished.

There are no special restrictions on magic here, and any large sized heroes are returned to their normal size.

‘Tortacalypse’

Rhulisti Life-Shaped Giant Tortoise
Large Construct; Hit Dice: 10d10+20 (86 hp); Initiative: -1; Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares); Armor Class: 22 (-1 size, -1 Dex, +14 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 26; Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+22
Attack: Slam +12 melee (1d8+9); Full Attack: 2 slams +12 melee (1d8+9); Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.; Special Attacks:

Improved Grab, Constrict 1d8+9, Trample 1d8+9, Shockwave, Fling Object, Smite Evil; Special Qualities: Construct Traits, Darkvision 60 ft., Low-Light Vision, Rhulisti Traits, Spell Resistance 20, Immunity to Magic, Slow and Steady; Saves: Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2; Abilities: Str 28, Dex 8, Con -, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 1; Skills: Listen +4, Spot +4; Feats: Power Attack, Improved Bull Rush, Toughness, Improved Natural Attack (slam), Awesome Blow, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Smite Evil; Challenge Rating: 9; Alignment: Neutral

Rhulisti Traits: Rhulisti life-shaped tortoises have a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks and can withdraw into their shells as a move action, gaining a +8 natural armor bonus to AC but becoming immobile.

Construct Traits: Immunity to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, and morale effects). Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromancy effects. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the Rhulisti life-shaped tortoise must hit with its slam attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Constrict (Ex): A Rhulisti life-shaped tortoise deals 1d8+9 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

Trample (Ex): As a full-round action, a Rhulisti life-shaped tortoise can trample Medium or smaller creatures for 1d8+9 points of damage. Opponents who do not make attacks of opportunity against the

tortoise can attempt a Reflex save (DC 20) to take half damage.

Shockwave (Ex): Once per day, as a free action, a Rhulisti life-shaped tortoise can slam its shell into the ground, creating a powerful shockwave that affects all creatures within a 15-foot radius. Affected creatures must make a Reflex save (DC 20) or be knocked prone and take 2d8 points of damage. Creatures that succeed on their saving throw take half damage and are not knocked prone.

Fling Object (Ex): As a standard action, a Rhulisti life-shaped tortoise can pick up an object within its reach and throw it at a target within 60 feet. The object must weigh 50 pounds or less and deals damage as determined by the DM.

Slow and Steady (Ex): Rhulisti life-shaped tortoises are slow-moving, but steady. They have a base speed of 20 ft., but their encumbrance and armor do not reduce their speed.

Immunity to Magic (Ex): Rhulisti life-shaped tortoises are immune to all spells and spell-like abilities except a Dispel Magic spell slows the life-shaped tortoise as per Slow spell (no save), while slowed the creature also takes double damage from all physical attacks.

Smite Evil (Su): Once per day, as a swift action, a Rhulisti life-shaped tortoise can call upon its life magic to smite evil. For the next 10 rounds, the tortoise's attacks deal an extra 2d6 points of damage against evil creatures. In addition, the tortoise gains a +4 bonus on attack rolls and a +4 bonus to its Armor Class against attacks made by evil creatures. The smite evil ability does not stack with any other smite ability.

Note: this creature could be a massive threat to lower-level groups of heroes. Thankfully, they do not HAVE to defeat it. If they are all 'killed' by it, they awaken (minus Gi who IS killed) in Encounter Six. If this happens, you will need to adjust the text there to accommodate this.

Encounter Six: You are not what we were looking for!

As soon as the beast is destroyed, it and the room around you vanishes. In its place, is a very comfortable looking room, adorned with all the furnishings one might expect to find a hermit in the jungle would have. There, standing next to Kumon Ubok, is very strange looking Shu. "Well," says the Shu in slow rumbling tones "You have proved your worthiness to speak with me. Now would you mind telling me just who you are and why you have invaded my house uninvited? Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Chuk'aa why have you come to see me? State your purpose!" He orders.

The heroes will likely be very confused, none more so than Gi who was not expecting this. They very well might recognize the name Chuk'aa from the parable of why the shu must not kill each other. Chuk'aa looks similar to modern Shu, except he has long tousled red hair on his head. His clothes likewise seem somewhat out of place, as it appears that they literally grew around him from various jungle vegetation, and they have yet to stop growing. If the heroes managed to say something about the Cup of the Brood Mother, read the following.

“Oh, of course.” Says the strange Shu condescendingly. “The Jungle Doppelgangers, those shape-shifting deceivers have been trying to find the Cup for years, but my protections have kept them at bay. I see they have found a new generation of dupes. But don’t worry, I will deal with the one with you.” He raises his hand and suddenly Gi is surrounded by vines and grasses, entangled in plantlife which bursts from the floor at his feet. As thorns from the vines poke him, his body begins to distort much like a katanga’s body does when changing forms. He seems to try to become an eagle, then a snake, but the plantlife seems too quick for him, and the thorns continued to pierce his body as he changes. Eventually, the convulsing ends, and you see the now wrapped body of a pale-green skinned hairless humanoid, that stands slightly shorter than a Nubari with long gangly limbs and fingers, and half-formed facial features, pointed ears and bulbous eyes in its slightly oversized head.

The heroes should not mistake Chuk’aa’s actions as an attack. If they do, and prepare to respond, Kumon Ubok will urge restraint. They should, however, start to understand that they have been manipulated by this creature. Chuk’aa will continue once he has gaged their reactions.

“It is ugly, isn’t it. Well, it is not alone. A small tribe of a few dozen of these Jungle Doppelgangers live within Malatra and they have always been servants of the Tamara. The Jungle Doppelgangers are shapeshifters, they can appear in any form they choose, and have been manipulating you to retrieve the Cup for them. You see, the Cup is not what they claimed it to be. It is a powerful evil artifact from the last war against the

Tamara that could allow the Tamara to breed and increase their numbers here, and it was responsible for the creation of many wicked creatures including this race of shapeshifters. They have sought it here for a long time, but they have never been able to make it this far. I can only assume, that they are the ones to manufacture the belief that the Shu have broken their one great taboo. With those words, the creature you once knew as Gi is absorbed into the earth as the plant vanishes behind him. Looking again, you see that there is no sign that the plant was ever even there.

At this point, the conversation becomes much more freeform. The heroes may have many questions. Some of the most common ones, and their answers are below.

Who exactly are you?: “My name, as I said is Chuk’aa. Yes, the one from the story which prompted the Shu’s taboo.”

How are you still alive?: “My life has been....extended... thanks to my crime, though I will not speak of those. It is enough that I am.”

You live here? Alone?/What is this place?: “The Tree of the Ancestors was sacred to my people in its time. It was Tree of Life, the last remaining link to our distant birth world. I have had some guests from time to time, but I value my solitude so that I can tend the tree in peace.”

Why do you look/dress so different?: “The young often forget their heritage. I may be closer to the modern Shu than to my ancestors who emigrated here after their folly damaged their own world, but I still honor my roots and retain some of the power that was once our birthright.

My people were once known as the Rhulisti, and they came here from a world ravaged by their own hubris. Over time, they began to change. They found themselves affected by the primal magic of the region. As generations passed, the Rhulisti became less recognizable. They adopted new names and new customs, and their culture became more integrated with the cultures of Malatra. Our final school once stood near the heart of the Yaku Plains, there all those who were Rhulisti could learn the skills and powers of our birth world. But.... a great tragedy struck.....of which I was the sole survivor.

What did you do with the doppelganger/Gi?: “I have had my plants deposit him on the far side of the domes that protect Malatra. He will not be able to return here, or report to his masters. It is a small mercy, but I find I have no stomach for real violence.”

What was the thing we fought outside?
“My guardian, do not fret at its destruction, I will build another.”

Do you have the Cup of the Brood Mother?: “It is not here. Many months ago I gave it to a witch doctor named Bengoukee to hide in exchange he gave me something of great value. I never learned what became of it afterward and was never able to find the rest of the set.”
If asked what he received in trade, Chuk’aa will not say yet, but it will be revealed soon.

Will you help us with Tiger?: “My war is long since over, I can provide some assistance but my heart is no longer in the fight. I do however, recognized that the Tamara are a threat to the entire world, and if they are not stopped in Malatra they will not be stopped anywhere. In short, we shall see.”

Was the taboo real, was it broken?: “No taboo has been broken, but the danger of that happening still exists. And reality is fluid when it comes to such things...certainly the Shu believe the taboo to be real, so why should it not. Nature itself sometimes bends to the beliefs of small groups of people.”

Eventually, Chuk’aa will bring the conversation to curse and taboo.

“Neither the Jengi nor the Shu in general are not cursed. In truth, no taboo was ever broken. The ‘Shu’ who killed Dexter was not Buster but a trick pulled by a Jungle Doppelganger trying to disharmonize the Shu. The Jungle Doppelgangers have been playing the long game, first by infecting the Jengi, and manipulating them to retrieve a component which he ensured would create the tribe’s madness.

The real Buster has been kept alive by the creatures so they could reveal the deception after the Shu truly break the taboo. Rescuing him may be the only way to convince the other Jengi that the taboo still stands. You have proven your worth, and I trust you. Will you go rescue Buster and free the Shu from the curse they believe they linger under?”

If the heroes do not agree, Chuk’aa will have had enough of them. He will raise his hand and envelop them with plants like he did Gi, and deposit them several days away. Assuming the heroes agree, continue.

“Excellent, I knew I could count on you. I will transport you to the location of the Jungle Doppelgangers' cave and give you this. This gem is called the Eye of the Tiger. While you carry it, neither you nor

your comrades can be seen by the forces of Tiger. Once you have rescued Buster, return the gem to Kumon Ubok. But be warned, although it is likely the Jungle Doppelgangers are within their cave and are instead spread throughout Malatra causing mischief for their Tamara overlords, they are not to be underestimated. They will likely have traps and guards left to prevent Buster's escape. Decide when you get there if you want to try to sneak inside or fight your way inside. Whenever you are ready to proceed to their lair, let me know."

Heroes now have a few rounds to heal, cast preparatory spells, or finish any lasting conversations with Chuk'aa (they will not see him again).

Chuk'aa

Rhulisti Halfling 7th level Druid/ 7th Level Egoist/3rd Level Life Shaper/1st Level Hero of Malatra.

Chuk'aa's AC, Ability Scores, Saves, and HP do not matter, as nothing the heroes can do will be able to harm him. Likewise, he will not attack them in anyway. His exact spells are unimportant for the purposes of this adventure, the classes and levels are just here to give the DM an idea of what he is capable of.

Note: Meeting Chuk'aa will automatically remove any Fear of Chuk'aa a hero may have obtained in the adventure 'Madness'.

Encounter Seven: Cave: Stealth or Heroic Battle?

Without even realizing that you had moved you find yourselves outdoors once again. Both Kumon Ubok and Chuk'aa are not with you. You stand in the undergrowth of the jungle, watching as a

small group of servants of Tiger stand guard in front of a cave. You realize that this cave entrance must be the one Chuk'aa spoke of: the lair of the Jungle Doppelgangers. You have a choice here, do you sneak inside, or do you fight your way in?

The type of guards in front of the entrance depends on the relative party level. For a low-level group, it is a group of six Troglodytes. For a higher-level group, it is a group of six Manscorpions.

If the heroes attempt to sneak into the cave, they must each make a Hide and a Move Silently check vs the guards Spot and Listen skills respectively. If a majority number of the group succeeds or there is a tie, on both checks, then they will have successfully bypassed the group. If both checks are failed, the heroes will be detected, and they will be chased away, or else combat will begin on the following round. If most of the group succeeds at one check but fails at the other, then the guards will be on high alert, and one of them will go to report to the Jungle Doppelganger who is guarding Buster and will be there for that battle. Since the heroes have the Eye of the Tiger with them, they will get a +5 on their attempts to Hide and to Move Silently. In addition to this, various magical spells or abilities could help boost their chances.

If the heroes attempt to fight their way in, then combat proceeds as normal except they will each have a free surprise round thanks to them carrying the Eye of the Tiger.

For Lower Level Groups

Troglodyte (6)

Medium Humanoid (Reptilian); Hit Dice: 2d8+4 (13 hp); Init:-1; Speed: 30 ft. (6

squares); AC: 15 (-1 Dex, +6 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 15; Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+1; Attack: Club +1 melee (1d6) or claw +1 melee (1d4) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6); Full Attack: Club +1 melee (1d6) and claw -1 melee (1d4) and bite -1 melee (1d4); or 2 claws +1 melee (1d4) and bite -1 melee (1d4); or javelin +1 ranged (1d6); Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.; SA: Stench; SQ: Darkvision 90 ft.; Saves: Fort +5, Ref -1, Will +0; Abilities: Str 10, Dex 9, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 10; Skills: Hide +5*, Listen +3, Spot +1; Feats: MultiattackB, Weapon Focus (javelin); Challenge Rating: 1; Alignment: CE

Stench (Ex)

When a troglodyte is angry or frightened, it secretes an oily, musk-like chemical that nearly every form of animal life finds offensive. All living creatures (except troglodytes) within 30 feet of a troglodyte must succeed on a DC 13 Fortitude save or be sickened for 10 rounds. The save DC is Constitution-based. Creatures that successfully save cannot be affected by the same troglodyte's stench for 24 hours. A delay poison or neutralize poison spell removes the effect from the sickened creature. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws.

Skills

The skin of a troglodyte changes color, allowing it to blend in with its surroundings like a chameleon and providing a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks. *In rocky or underground settings, this bonus improves to +8.

For Higher Level Groups

Manscorpions (6)

Large Monstrous Humanoid; HD:12d8+12 (66 hp); Init:+1; Speed:40 ft. (8 squares); AC:16 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +6 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 15; Base Attack/Grapple:+12/+20; Attack: Lance +15 melee (2d6+6/x3) or sting +15 melee (1d8+4) or claw +15 melee (1d6+4); Full Attack: Lance +15/+10/+5 melee (2d6+6/x3) and sting +15 melee (1d8+2) and 2 claws +15 melee (1d6+2); Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.; SA: Trample 1d8+6, poison, spell-like abilities; SQ: Darkvision 60 ft., resistance to fire 5, spell resistance 18; Saves: Fort +5, Ref +9, Will +10; Abilities: Str 19, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 15; Skills: Diplomacy +4, Intimidate +6, Sense Motive +7, Listen +7, Spot +7; Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Improved Multiattack, Multiattack, Power Attack; CR:7; AI: LE.

Trample (Ex)

Reflex half DC 20. The save DC is Strength-based.

Poison (Ex)

A scorpionfolk delivers its poison (Fortitude save DC 17) with each successful sting attack. The initial and secondary damage is 1d4 points of Dexterity damage.

Spell-Like Abilities

1/day - major image; 2/day - mirror image, Caster level 10th; save DC 12 + spell level.

Once you have made your way past the guards and into the cave, you find that it weaves as it descends, but there are no branches or forks in the passageway. Finally, you come to a massive chamber, which you assume must be some sort of meeting room. There in a pair of cages in the center of the room are two Shu, both looking rattled and exhausted.

The Shu introduce themselves as Buster and Blu. They claim they were captured about a month ago by several Black Leopard Katanga, though they haven't seen them since. Of course, if the heroes have been paying attention, they should know that the real Blu is dead, and this one is a Jungle Doppelganger left here to guard Buster and prevent the Shu's racial monophobia from driving him mad. The Jungle Doppelgangers hoped the other Shu tribes would try to take vengeance on the Jengi for their taboo breaking, at which point Buster would be revealed as alive and the other tribes would know that they themselves had been the ones to break the taboo.

Both Buster and Blu only know of events leading up to them going in search of the Spirit who helped their tribe with its illness (in the adventure Infection). If the heroes somehow do not figure out that Blu in an imposter, he will eventually grow angry with them as his Detect Thoughts ability is useless against them thanks to the Eye of the Tiger. He is desperate to learn if the plan to retrieve the Cup of the Brood Mother succeeded. If the heroes tell him what they have found, he will attack them. They know about the existence of the Jungle Doppelgangers! That alone means the heroes need to die before they can pass that information on to others.

Jungle Doppelganger

Medium-Sized Shapechanger; Hit Dice: 4d8+4 (26 hp); Initiative: +1 (Dex); Speed: 30 ft.; AC: 15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural); Attacks: 2 slams +4 melee; Damage: Slam 1d6+1; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; Special Attacks: Detect thoughts; Special Qualities: Alter self, immunities; Saves: Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +6; Abilities: Str 12, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 13; Skills: Bluff +16*, Disguise +16*, Listen +11, Sense

Motive +6, Spot +8; Feats: Alertness, Dodge; Alignment: NE; Challenge Rating: 3

Detect Thoughts (Su): A jungle doppelganger can continuously detect thoughts as the spell cast by an 18th level sorcerer (save DC 13). It can suppress or resume this ability as a free action.

Alter Self (Su): A jungle doppelganger can assume the shape of any Tiny, Small or Medium-sized creature native to Malatra including plant life such as trees and vines. This works like alter self as cast by an 18th-level sorcerer, but the jungle doppelganger can remain in the chosen form indefinitely. It can assume a new form or return to its own as a standard action.

Immunities (Ex): Jungle doppelgangers are immune to sleep and charm effects.

Skills: A jungle doppelganger receives a +8 racial bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks.

*When using alter self, a jungle doppelganger receives an additional +10 competence bonus to Disguise checks. If it can read an opponent's mind, it gets a further +4 bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks.

Buster is, at first horrified, then saddened then outraged by what truly happened to Blu. He is upset that he never discovered the deception in all the time he was with Blu. He says that he will ensure the Jengi, or any Shu tribe will not be tricked in the same way again.

Conclusion

You return to the Jengi and immediately upon seeing Buster, the mood of the tribe begins to change. Apparently, Kumon Ubok, who stands waiting for you, has told the tribe the truth but they were slow to believe him. Now you bring proof, that not only is Buster alive, but that it was not a Shu who killed Dexter. This means the taboo is still in place: there is no

curse. In no time at all, Futori has declared there will be a party thrown in your honor, as runners are sent to every village to tell the story of your heroism. As a reward, you are each presented with a masterwork weapon of your choice from the following, a half spear, a blowgun, a short bow, a dagger, or a club. In addition, they are each given a brewing mixture of coffee which will allow each of them to create a pot of the caffeinated drink. Finally, and more ephemerally, Kumon Ubok tells you that Chuk'aa has relayed to him in thanks for your efforts he owes you a favor. All they need do is ask and he shall hear them and, if it is within his power, grant it. (DM's should adjudicate this based on a reading of his class levels and likely abilities. Note: Chuk'aa's favor to any hero with the 'Curse of Chuk'aa' curse obtained in the adventure 'Madness', will be to remove it.)

Here ends Cursed

Why The Shu Must Not Kill Each Other

One day when the world was young, three Shu brothers were hunting in the jungle.

After some time, they chanced upon a little clearing where they found a strange Shu, peacefully asleep in the shadow of a tree. Their glance fell upon the jewel-encrusted short bow that was slung over the other Shu's shoulder and envy filled their minds. The three brothers looked at each other and nodded; they understood each other without words. They would simply kill the stranger and take the splendid weapon.

So, the first hunter set his blowgun to his lips. His aim was true, and the tiny arrow buried itself in the sleeper's heart. Little did he know, however, that this was none other than the mighty Chuk'aa, the hero to whom the spirits themselves had granted invulnerability as a reward for his countless deeds of valor. Chuk'aa just grunted sleepily and brushed the arrow off with his hand as if it had been of no more consequence than a mosquito's sting. At that the three brothers grew frightened, but their greed was still stronger than their fear. The second brother tried to kill the stranger, and then the third - all to no avail. Mere mortal weapons could not harm Chuk'aa, beloved of the spirits.

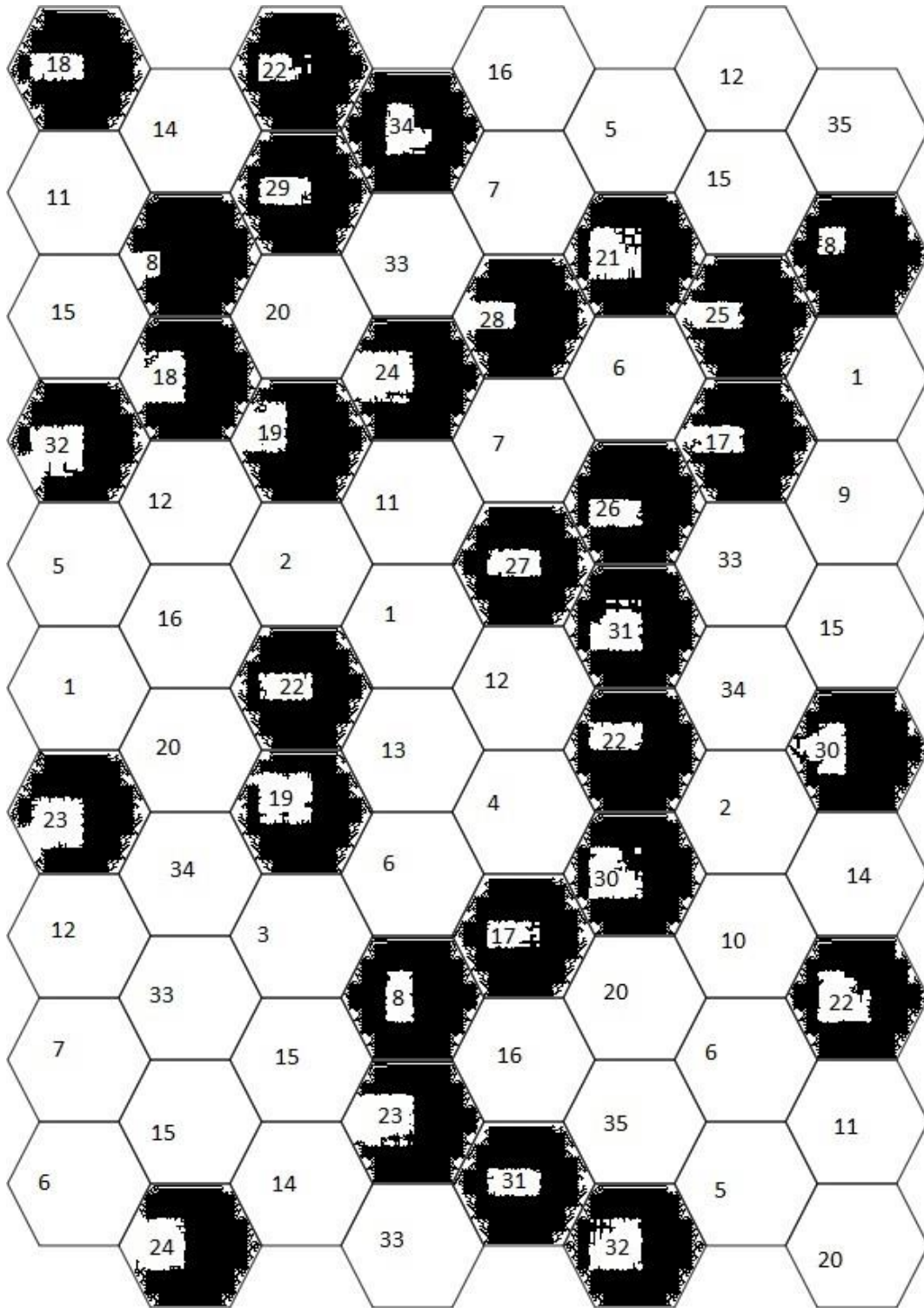
It was only then the Chuk'aa awoke, and it did not take him long to understand why was going on. Chuk'aa grew very, very angry. "Miserable thieves!" he thundered. "Did you really think to catch the great Chuk'aa unawares? Well, I shall teach you to murder peaceful travelers in their sleep!" With those words he advanced upon the three brothers, and when he was done, not one of them remained standing.

Arms akimbo, Chuk'aa surveyed the groaning would-be murderers. "Let that be a lesson to you", he said, "and tell your people that if I ever hear of another shu laying hands on one of his brother-Shu, be it for greed or for any other reason, he will suffer a much worse punishment than the three of you. Now go!"

The three brothers dragged themselves back to their village and reported to the elders what had happened to them. Word of it soon reached the other Shu tribes and, within a few days, spread throughout all of Malatra. And ever since that time, no Shu has dared harm another Shu, for they are afraid that Chuk'aa might still be watching.

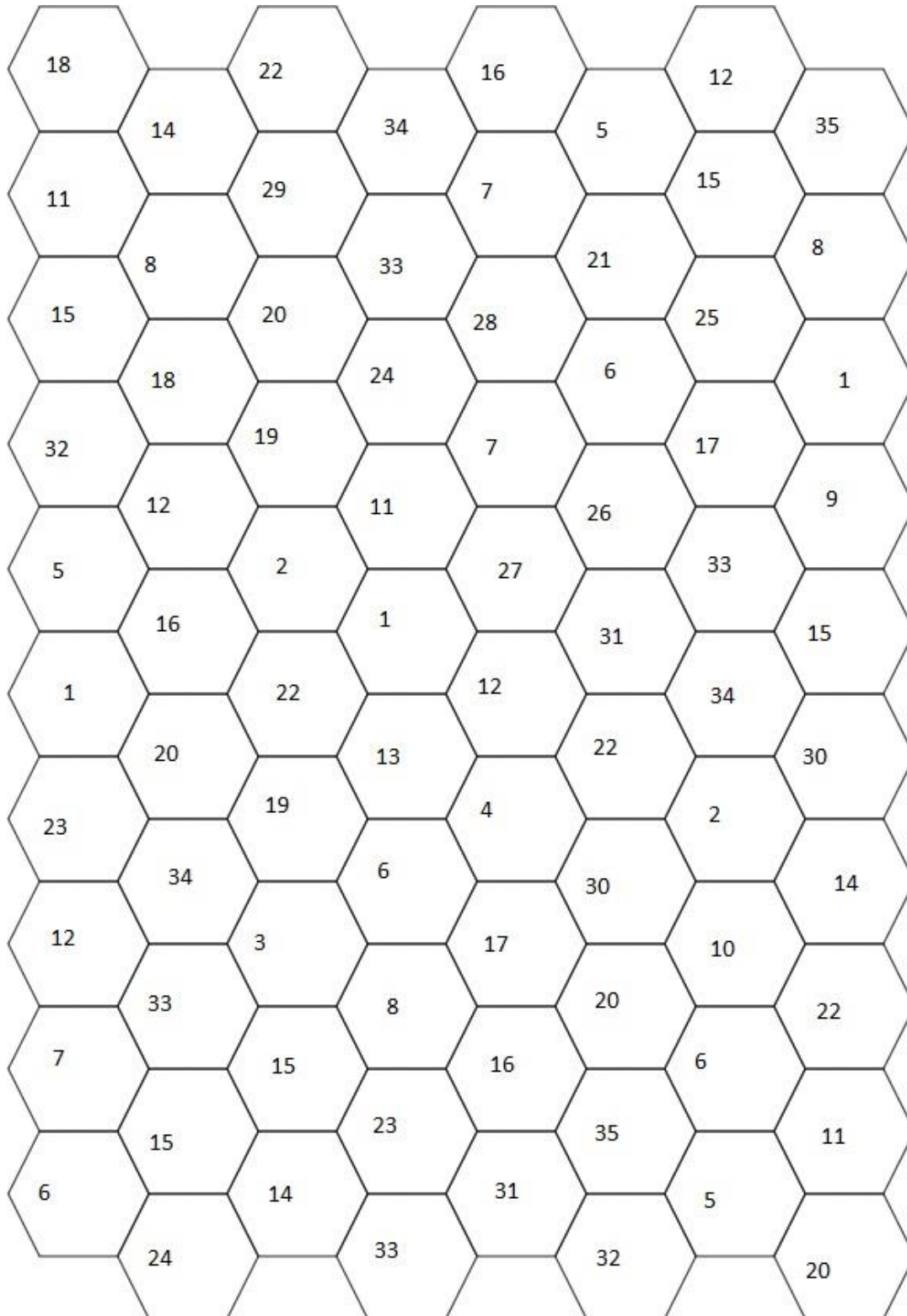
In recent years, this legend has been understood to mean, that when a Shu kills another Shu then Malatra itself will soon be destroyed because of them. Where this belief came from is unknown, but most Shu believe it.

Tile Map with Safe Tiles Highlighted



Heroes start here

Tile Map for Players



Heroes start here