

Tales From Malatra:

Stories From The Jungles Of Southern Kara-tur.

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Tags: Malatra Living Jungle Kara-tur Forgotten Realms

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Columns: Leaves On The River – Fiction Set In The Malatran Jungle.
'Hunting Grounds' By Joshua Knels

Tales Of Malatra – Rules Expansion & Role-Playing Hooks
'Idle Hands, part 1' By Ryan Conrad

Jungle Moods—Inspiration for the Setting.
'The Rosh'Shok Tamara' by someone listed as 'Morrison'
'The Spell Worker Tamara' By J.D. Mount
(<https://www.deviantart.com/ravendyn>)

Jungle Trails – Mini-adventures and Scenarios in Malatra
'A Late Harvest' By Ryan Conrad

Jungle Drums – Questions, Discussion & Heroes

Welcome to Tales From Malatra!

It's been about a year and a half since the last issue, and I wasn't expecting to start more until at least January of 2021, but the global situation has convinced me to rush a few of these out while I can, if only to help keep people entertained.

I am shooting for at least 4 issues before the end of the year, and any short stories, creative art projects, game rules (for any edition), or old campaign recollections would be welcome additions. Feel free to contact me through Facebook or at my email address above.

It has been a little over a year since former RPGA Living Jungle Campaign Coordinator Steve Jay passed, and since he was the one who suggested restarting the old newsletter, I would like to dedicate this issue to him.

Malatra has long passed outside the realm of the Living Jungle, or RPGA involvement. During the RPGA's tenure there were rule sets for two different editions. Since then, I have been made aware of at least 4 different people (myself included) who have run games in parts of the setting utilizing the 5th edition ruleset. Since there is no official 5e for many of the setting's elements yet, these have often been homebrewed. I hope to help change that in some subsequent issues of this newsletter.

Where Steve advocated a ‘Rules Agnostic’ style in his later writing for the setting, I prefer a ‘Rules Lite, but Rules Inclusive’ philosophy for these newsletters. Meaning I will endeavor to give stats or rules using all three of the said systems for anything published here. Hence, if people have some interesting characters, rules, or even adventures from two decades and two or three game editions ago, now is your chance to get things out so people can see them. I’ll worry about any conversions that might need to be done.

Unless otherwise specified, all lore given within these newsletters will be set after The Year of Grieving and Celebrations, or more than a year after the end of the Ancient Enemy story arc and the RPGA’s involvement, but before The Year of Angry Gods (transition to 5e) about a decade later.

With that, we have our next issue. I hope you approve.
Game Well!

-Ryan Conrad, aka ‘Apotheot’

Leaves On The River

Hunting Grounds

by Joshua Knels

A young nubari man stalked one of the many hunting trails of the jungle of Malatra. He was tall for his age, with long wild black hair and toned, dark skin. The young hunter wore a simple loin cloth and carried with him a hunting spear, short bow with a dozen arrows, two obsidian daggers tucked in his hemp belt, and a small backpack with supplies for his hunt should it take longer than expected. His name was Amare; a name that he shared with his father, who was an accomplished hunter that saved the village numerous times from garuda attacks and rival tribes. This was Amare’s first hunt on his own; he had joined with his father and the other hunters before to hunt for food and even helped to fight off garuda from the village, but today was his challenge to overcome. He must complete the trial for young men to enter adulthood by hunting down a beast and bring back their kill.

Amare had spent two days away from his village as he hunted for the perfect prey. By midday, he found a small clearing near the hunting trail. Amare hid behind a large tree and looked around to make sure that he was alone before he wandered into the grove and set down his pack. While he dug inside for his rations, the young hunter heard a branch snap nearby. Amare quickly grabbed his spear and looked around for the source of the noise. To his surprise, a large black leopard had wandered out from the brush. His heart pumped wildly as the leopard started to circle the young nubari while it looked for an opening to pounce. Amare kept the spear pointed at the leopard just as his father had taught him. The hunter kept his eyes focused on the leopard, careful not to look away.

With no clear opening, the leopard roared at Amare and made a swipe with their claws in attempt to intimidate the young nubari, but Amare held his position. The leopard hissed again in frustration as the beast continued to stalk the hunter. The leopard attempted to intimidate him again when Amare stepped forward and lunged his spear at the beast. The leopard jumped back in alarm from the nubari’s advance, surprised by his fierce determination. With the leopard caught off guard, Amare threw his spear, but missed by mere inches as the leopard ducked.

Unarmed, the Amare walked backwards while pulling out his obsidian daggers. Seeing the chance, the leopard pounced forward and pushed the young hunter to the ground. Pinned to the ground, Amare howled in pain as the claws dug into his chest, red ichor oozed out of his burning, torn flesh. He swung

his arms up at the beast's shoulders with his obsidian daggers, driving the stone blades into the feline's body. The leopard howled in pain before the beast sank their fangs into Amare's neck.

The young and inexperienced hunter choked on his blood as the leopard viciously pulled back and tore a large gaping hole into Amare's neck. He looked up with wide, terrified eyes as Amare dropped the obsidian daggers and put his hands to his throat in a desperate attempt to stop the bleeding. He tried to yell out for help, but it was all in vain.

While Amare struggled to cling onto life, the leopard shifted its form. Now, a dark-skinned woman with wild black hair sat atop the dying Amare while blood dripped from her mouth. She watched in abated silence until the life in Amare's eyes drifted away. Victorious, the leopard katanga woman smirked while she stood up and looked down at her kill, her trial for adulthood complete.

Tales Of Malatra

Idle Hands

Part 1 of 4

By Ryan Conrad

Mirmirani sat inside her chieftain's hut at a table filled with items. The trinkets and ornaments littering it had all been gifts, first for her intended nuptials, and when that didn't work out, for her ascension to chieftain of the Saiyama nearly a month earlier. She sighed as she again wondered what she was going to do with everything.

A rustle at her door flap let her know someone was there. "Mistress?" came the voice of Mirrah, once the protector of her late husband and now hers as well. "Flood is here and wishes to speak with you." she growled.

"You can let him in," the chieftain declared, noting the obvious disapproval from Mirrah about letting a man into her hut unescorted.

Flood didn't give her much of an opening. "I did it!" he declared as he dropped a stack of tied leaves on her table.

"You've finished? Already? It has only been a few weeks!" Mirmirani asked in obvious surprise.

"It didn't take all that long, mostly some campfire gossiping, and a single quick trip to each of the tribes in order to verify some information." The river tam'hi replied.

"This is it?" asked the nubari chieftain looking at the small stack of leaves.

"Yes, I am not sure our paper quality is quite as good as the books that were in the Valley of the Lion," he said referring to the distant place some heroes had visited in order to obtain the Viserathu during the war. "But it seems to hold ink."

"That is good," the chieftain responded as she examined the bundle. "Because if this is truly done well you may have other 'books' to write in the future." she said, the word feeling alien on her tongue.

She was already thinking ahead to Flood writing a real written history of the war, one that wouldn't change each time it was told around the campfire, I mean really how many Tamara did Grey Shadow

single-handedly kill during the Battle of Two Moons again? Six? Or was it up to seven now? She couldn't keep track. Everyone also seemed to have their own take on who did what during the war, even in the final battle. Some people even believed she had died, and were more than surprised to hear she had survived. Some of that was fine, a natural consequence of stories was that they got embellished and changed every time a new person told them. But stories could get messy--impractical if they were continually edited into future generations. After all, the jungle would have found it much easier to understand and react to the coming of the Tamara had they known exactly what they were in for and had they had not been couched in all the "Tiger" mythology.

"Now let me take a look at this." said Mirmirani. "This won't take too long, please wait." She told Flood

Flood watched as she began to read, knowing the truth of it. Mirmirani had trained with Bengoukee in her youth and had taken to the new skill of reading better than any Flood had yet met. He sat patiently while she read.

Aaracokra

The bird people have been steadfast allies since they were first introduced to the Council of Tribes. Although apparently beyond reproach, they have a most peculiar origin story, one which seems to mesh with our own lore. In it they were all nubari once, whether this means they were modern or ancient nubari varies with the telling, but regardless they had an encounter with the item called Blue Heron. This Item magically transformed their tribe into the aaracokra we know today. Their shamans confirm this story after communing with the ancestor spirits and nature spirits near their tribal nest. Although this story is colorful, devotees of the great Air Spirit Nigemba claim that he has told them that the bird people were transplanted from the same world the great spirits fled. Why one of these sources would be lying or mistaken is cause for some speculation at best, concern at worst. It is also possible that neither source is entirely accurate and that the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Beloks

These strange subterranean creatures are not what I would consider a major threat.

Universally short, about the size of a shu, the race makes good use of basic tools and weapons such as nets and spears. So far, the only group we have encountered live underground though it is possible there are more tribes that live elsewhere. Although intelligent, they only seem to be able to communicate rudimentary ideas through sign language; though it is obvious they can communicate with each other and have a wailing ability that gives those trying to concentrate on magic a headache. I would recommend further investigation into this unique race, though I do not feel they are ready yet to join us on the Council of Tribes.

Bullywugs



Malicious frog-like humanoids called bullywugs, live in small communities near particularly wet spots and seem to be ruled by the strongest members of their society.

They generally attack any nubari, shu, or korobokuru on sight, but usually only just to capture utilizing the nets they carry. They give most katanga a bit more freedom, as it is possible that due to the bullywug's limited intelligence, they get scared when the creatures shift form. Oddly, they all but revere the tam'hi, and will not attack a river tam'hi unless their survival depends on it. They are trappers by nature, and frequently hunt small mammals in the area, presumably as a food source. We know from at least one former captive who escaped the creatures when yaun-ti attacked, that the various groups all follow one 'great' bullywug and they mentioned something about a prophecy they called the "Reign of Frogs". Unfortunately, that is all the information we have been able to gather about the race as of yet.

Bakemono

These creatures are strangely rare in the jungle, considering their racial offspring the butu seem so prevalent. This is obviously a good thing, as they are known to be voracious carnivores, and be horribly unpleasant toward other races. They attack creatures with little regard for their own safety, which makes me believe that most of them were likely killed by garuda long ago. One odd note is that although they have wings, they have never been seen using them. The butu insist that these were non-functional and decorative only. They claim that the reason their ancestor race, the kobold, was attractive to them was the fact that they lacked wings. It is unknown what the kobolds would have seen in these vicious creatures though. There has been no bakemono sighting since before the war with Tiger.

Butu

The butu are not a naturally evolved race. They themselves know this and know exactly what happened. To hear them tell the story, they are descended from the union of two races, one race of dog-like creatures--something our osgray friends called 'kobolds'. The kobolds had been brought by the Ancients in great numbers, to be used as menial servants. When their civilization fell, the surviving urd were somehow set free. They encountered the bakemono, and soon the two races began to interbreed. The resulting race also had no wings but found themselves hardy in other ways. Some butu stories tell of counting coup on the flying garuda as their warriors tried to outrun the creatures from their home mountain (presumably Fire Mountain). This would explain why we have discovered more than four tribes of butu between Fire Mountain and the distant Forbidden Mountains. There are also unconfirmed reports that a tribe might exist in the remote sections of the Howling Mountains. Their scattered nature means they could have been a greater witness to the evolution of the Jungle than we were previously aware. This could mean that the Bootoo, that tribe of abject cowards that has become very well known in recent years, might have actually taken their name from members of this race.

Dark Trees

At first look, these malicious creatures seem simply like animated plants. If it weren't for our plantmen allies insisting that they were intelligent, I would have dismissed them from inclusion in this list. According to them, the creatures do tend to migrate, though they move so slowly that you might never notice. In combat they have a terrifying bite which seems to infect their target with confusion as to what is going on. Although their obvious intent is to consume their target, they seem to prefer their meals in this confused state. One wonders if it does something to make them more appetizing, or if it just cruelty that drives them to act in such a way.

Grippli

These diminutive frog-like people are actually rather friendly. In addition to Malatran Common, they speak a language we have not yet been able to learn. The race is ordinarily non-aggressive, but they do tend to be territorial especially in regard to dealing with reptilian races. It is known that they are also very religious and are a matriarchal society. One rumor about them comes from members of the Tenanga who claim a group of grippli moved in to the Swam of the Snake Men not long ago. One wonders if this is somehow a reaction to the increased yaun-ti aggression.

Hobgoblins

This war-like race has not been seen in a generation. But stories tell that the creatures were taller than nubari, extremely muscular, and brilliant tactical thinkers. The last encounter the tribes had with this race involved nearly a dozen hobgoblin warriors fighting against twice as many Huroola. The Huroola won the engagement, but only 4 of their number survived. Since this race has not made itself known to us once again during the war with the Tamara, it is unlikely they still exist.

Jungle Doppelgangers

No servant of the Tamara was more insidious than the jungle doppelganger. These creatures could shape change to look like any nubari, shu, tam'hi, katanga, or korobokuru. They would use these abilities to sow discord by mimicking influential people in various tribes. Unfortunately, we don't know much about this race, wherever they are located, what their numbers are, or what their overall goals are now that their Tamara masters are gone remains a mystery.

Jungle Giants

The Jungle Giants were truly one of the most pleasant surprises to come from the time of the war. While outwardly they are terrifying to most nubari, katanga, shu and the like, they have proved themselves incredibly gentle and peaceful race. Indeed, they are incredibly friendly, if not particularly knowledgeable. A pair of them even helped fight at the Battle for Blood Bridge, but sadly these two died soon after that conflict. As far as we have been able to determine they all come from the village called Hafoka which we discovered just prior to the war. When asked about potential other jungle giant

settlements the idea elicits confusing and nonsensical responses like, "been here forever, just like you", "all giants live in Hafoka", "before here, we in Hafoka". Language can be a real barrier here, but there are no worries about the gentle race getting frustrated with questions that are a little prodding even if their answers are a bit circular. It is known that the giants are somehow involved with an event which occurs about once a generation called the Great Walk. Ffft told me that a few saru seem to know something about this event, but when asked, they become uncharacteristically quiet. I guess, for, now, it will just have to remain another mystery of the jungle.

To be Continued....

Next: Katanga—Kretch

Jungle Moods

Towards the end of the RPGA era, there were a few drawings done that depicted some new creatures from the campaign. I have endeavored to share some of these on the Facebook group, unfortunately I have been told that at least one was unable to be viewed by everyone. So, I will re-share it here. It is the only known depiction of any of the Tamara. It is called 'Rosh'Shak the Assassin', by an unknown artist but signed "Morrison". Below that, a friend is helping to depict the other tamara that appeared. J.D. Mount's work in progress sketch: 'Spell Worker Tamara'.





Jungle Trails

(Editor's note: This mini-adventure was originally released for free on the Facebook group in 2018)

A Late Harvest

This is a mini-adventure for a group of 4-6 player character heroes of levels 3-6 set in Malatra. It utilizes the 3rd edition rules set.

The Beginning:

It has been a few years since the end of the war with Tiger, and attention has turned to finding those individuals and tribes which have been missing for some time. One individual, a reclusive hermit called Hotal, has not been heard from since the Great Funeral of the Tribes, following the war. You and your group

have been sent to find out what happened to him.

You are in the jungle west of Fire Mountain, and the weather is fair for the season. As you approach the hut of Hotal you first notice the eerie silence. The second thing you notice is the strange amount of tree growth; three of them are in front of the doorway to the hut blocking easy access.

Approaching the hut:

Ask for Spot Checks (DC 15). Anyone who makes it will notice the trees moving in an odd

fashion (against the wind). A Knowledge (Nature), or Survival check (DC 10) will immediately let the player identify the trees as Twig Blights. There are 6 (total of 9) other Twig Blights in and around the jungle nearby. If heroes attack the Twig Blights directly all others will respond.

If a hero tries to bypass the Twig Blight, they will move to block them. If they attempt to communicate, the Twig Blights can understand them but they do not speak any language the heroes could know. A Plantman Hero, using sign language could communicate, as could anyone using a Comprehend Languages or similar spell.

The Twig Blights have no interest in direct combat, but they were warned by their master that they should prevent anyone from entering the hut. Ordinarily they wouldn't follow orders from any creature, but the master has used a spell to compel their servitude (Command Plants). The Twig Blights could be tricked or otherwise convinced to let the heroes enter the hut, they are not incredibly bright. Use a DC 8 for any Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate checks people wish to make in order to get past. Sneaking past is also an option; they have a spot of +4. Their orders are also specific to the door, so someone entering by other means is not their problem, and they will not follow anyone into the hut, and do not care about keeping anyone inside of it.

9 Twig Blights (EL 3)

Twig Blight; Small Plant; Mv 20. HD 1d8+1, hp 5; AC 15 (+1 size, +1 dex, +3 nat), Touch 12, Flat Footed 14, Full Attack 2 Claws, +0 each Melee; Damage 1d3-1 plus poison, SA Poison Fort DC 11 or lose 1 Str Stackable; SQ: Half Damage from Piercing Weapons, Plant Traits; Saving Throws Fort+3, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 13,

Con 12, Int 5, Wis 11, Cha 4; Skills: Hide +10, Listen +4, Move Silently +5, Spot +4; CR 1/3.

Poison (Ex): A Twig Blight delivers its poison (Fortitude save DC 11) with each successful claw attack. The initial damage is 1 point of Strength damage; there is no secondary damage.

Plant Traits (Ex): A Twig Blight is immune to Poison, Sleep, Paralysis, Stunning, and Polymorphing. It is not subject to critical hits or mind-affecting effects. The creature also has low-light vision.

Once the Heroes have made it inside the hut one way or another, read the following:

Once inside you can tell that something truly bad happened here. The hut is in shambles, broken bottles and chairs litter the floor; an overturned and slashed sleeping mat lies in the corner, and a large of logs looks like it has been scattered. Worst of all, the body of Hotal lies dead in the center of the room, several small puncture marks and bruises cover him.

A Healing skill check (DC 10) will reveal Hotal has not been dead more than an hour or so. He has nothing of interest on him. The heroes can search the room. A DC 15 will allow them to find a rock in the dirt floor of the hut, though it will take a strength check (DC 20) to move the rock. Only two people can hold try to move it at a time. Under the rock, is a Runestaff. The Runestaff contains one each of the spells Barkskin, Goodberry, Cat's Grace, Antiplant Shell, and Flamestrike all cast at 15th level. It has 3 empty slots.

The Runestaff is why the hut has been trashed; it was the object the Briarvex was searching for. During the War, the Tamara discovered a small group of Briarvex near the northern border of Malatra. They determined that the creatures would make great soldiers and gifted many of them with minor magical items to secure their allegiance.

The hermit Hotal found out about the creatures before they could attack any village and took it upon himself to deal with them. He took with him his prized magic runestaff he had obtained in his youth. With the help of the Wall of Fire, Blight, and Flamestrike spells it previously held, he was able to destroy most of the creatures, but he missed one. One gnarled bush near the site of the battle was a young briarvex, who witnessed the entire thing.

When the briarvex had grown sufficiently, it was able to retrieve the magical Amulet of Plant Control from its dead kin. With it, the creature is able to cast Plant Control 1/day. It then set out to seek revenge.

After first dominating a small group of Twig Blights, it began to search for Hotal and soon found him. It also noticed that Hotal still carried the Runestaff when he traveled. The Briarvex had witnessed the power of the Runestaff firsthand and was wary that it could be used against him as it had been his kin. Convinced that it could destroy him, he determined that he must find the Runestaff. When Hotal was away fishing in a nearby stream, he set up an ambush for Hotal within the hut. When Hotal returned, he was caught unaware, and without his Runestaff.

As Hotal died, the Briarvex searched for the Runestaff and he had his Twig Blights ransack his hut looking for it. They were unable to find it. So, it assumed that the Runestaff had been left with near Hotal's fishing hole. He left the Twig Blights to guard the hut while it went to retrieve the Runestaff. That was only a few hours ago.

As the Heroes leave the hut, they will encounter Briarvex returning, and still looking for the Runestaff. If they did not destroy the Twig Blights on the way inside, then they will join in on the combat (EL 7; use the stats from above). The Runestaff can be used in combat to help

the Heroes, but since they do not know any of the command words for the staff, or likely the spells the DC for any Use Magic Device skill check is 20. Also, please note that no Simbara will use the Flamestrike spell in combat and may actually leave the group if it is used by a fellow hero. Any Plantman or Tam'hi heroes would also never use that spell.

Read the following:

As you exit the hut, you notice a hulking Nubari-like plant creature approaching. It is definitely not a plant man, and it is obviously very hostile!

Briarvex; Large Plant; Mv 30 improved woodland stride; HD 8; hp 68; AC 19 (-1 size. +10 natural), Touch 9, Flat-footed 19; Full Attack 2 Spiked fists; +12 each melee; Damage 2d6+7 Plus thorn burrow; SD: DR 5/slashing; SA: Power Attack, Throne Burrow, Entangle; SQ: Plant Traits; Saving Throws: Fort +10, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 25, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 11; Hide +17 (in jungle), Listen +7, Spot +7, Survival +6; Magic Item: Amulet of Plant Control; CR: 6.

Improved Woodland Stride (Ex): A Briarvex can move through undergrowth at normal speeds without taking damage or suffering impairment.

Plant Traits (Ex): A Briarvex is immune to Poison, Sleep, Paralysis, Stunning, and Polymorphing. It is not subject to critical hits or mind-affecting effects. The creature also has low-light vision.

Thorn Burrow (Su): A Briarvex's spiked fist deals piercing as well as bludgeoning damage. Each time a Briarvex hits with its spiked fist, thorns break off and bore into the struck opponent. As a swift action, the Briarvex can cause embedded thorns to twist and burrow into a single creatures' flesh, dealing 3d6 piercing damage;

damage reduction applies. The target of this ability must be within 100 feet of the Briarvex and the Briarvex must have line of effect to the target. A creature can remove the thorns with a standard action.

Entangle (Su): As the Entangle spell; at will; DC 18; caster level 8th. This ability affects a 60-ft radius around the Briarvex and lasts for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Plant Control (Amulet) The Briarvex can use the Command Plants spell 1/day at 15th level of experience. It has used this to take control of the Twig Blights.

Conclusion.

With the Briarvex (and possibly the Blights) defeated, the Heroes are able to do whatever they want.

If they take the Amulet of Plant Control, they will be confronted by Plantmen several times, urging them to turn it over to them.

XP for the adventure ranges from 450 to 900 depending on ECL of the Heroes.

Jungle Drums

Now It is time to hear from you. Firstly, before he passed Steve was going to try to do a “Malatran Walkabout”, a sort of guide to the setting. Years ago, he asked the mailing list a question I will not put out as well: Did you play in the final adventure at Gen Con or elsewhere such as online? Did your character survive? He had gotten quite a bit of info from the old players. Sadly, all of his notes including the emails and the hard drive they were on were lost in a hurricane several years ago. But he hoped it could still be done in some way. So, I am asking for that info again. I look forward to hearing from any who were there.

Lastly, I am always on the lookout for jungle themed art (as you can see, this issue is pretty sparse). If you have useful sketches, please send them to me for inclusion in a subsequent issue.

Apotheot@yahoo.com (flag messages with “Malatra” to get through spam filter.)

Until next time,

Ryan Conrad.