



Bungle in the Jungle

Poachers slash and burn HIV treatment

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The South Pacific's Borneo rain forest may pack a fierce bark against HIV. Its bitangor tree contains a latex compound, Calanolide A, now in Phase II clinical trials for FDA approval. This non-nuke has also proved effective in chopping down tuberculosis. But the rain forest, which spans Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, is vanishing beneath timber poachers. Scientists estimate that one in eight plant species are currently endangered, and conservationists want to put the bitangor on life support. "If you clear cut the rain forest and replace it with an oil-palm plantation, you're getting rid of an incredible proven source of medications for HIV and other diseases," says Tom Lalley, senior communications officer at the World Wildlife Fund. Nearly 60% of all medications on the market today depend on active ingredients plucked straight from Mother Nature. Where's Al Gore when you need him?

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