

FARAJI (M/N/WIS) AK: 1 (staff) LL: 5 (9 HP) ME: 50' (--) SP: 6/+1

The wise Faraji has a CIRCLET OF POWER (+1 SP). He likes healing and lore, possessing Bane, Calm, Cure, Heal, Know, Ruse, and Ruin.

MAJESTA (F/N/DEX) AK: 2 (daggers) LL: 5/(*) (18 HP) ME: 50' (--)

Per the above, Majesta eschews armor for speed and fights ambidextrously with two daggers (she has the thrusting move).

Lawful (L)	Strength (STR)	Wisdom (WIS)
Neutral (N)	Dexterity (DEX)	Constitution (CON)
Chaotic (C)	Intelligence (INT)	Charisma (CHA)

Adding to the Governor's woes, the court scribe, Clement, has recently gone missing, and his friends (including Faraji) are worried for his safety, perhaps recognizing some greater evil. This relates to the temple...

GETTING THERE

As agreed, the characters will be escorted to the temple by a dozen men driving a team of elephants with supplies. To this end, the party is equipped with food and water enough for a full week if carefully rationed, including additional stores for the rest. The handlers are commoners (1-3 hits), skilled in tracking and armed with daggers and long spears.

THE SECRET OF ATARAK

Atarak was an ancient god worshipped (and greatly feared) by a flourishing civilization that predates the current population. No longer willing to suffer his yoke, however, their priests made an elaborate prison beneath a marble edifice built with great effort. Then, using a powerful stone (Key to the Jail of Atarak), they called the god and imprisoned him underground in a chamber accessible only by a narrow shaft sealed by the mysterious key beyond hope of release barring some equally miraculous aid.

But the dark god found a way...

For centuries, Atarak could only brood in silence, although in time, some strength returned and he could reach out in dreams to those wretched souls weak enough to fall under his powerful spell. Eventually, Averil was tempted and, using his horde of urshag fighters, journeyed in secret to the temple, extracting the key and freeing Atarak on the promise of power. But the risen god was still too weak to take material form, although still going forth as a destructive energy and possessing nearby animals to test his power.

In time, Clement, the court scribe, began to suspect something was amiss and uncovered the plot. Girding his resolve, he stole back the plundered artifact and hired some locals to escort him to the temple. This daring plan failed when a jungle troll (the terrible gor-koruk) possessed by Atarak ambushed the small party and killed everyone after a fierce battle. Despite this, Atarak could not yet handle the powerful key and was forced to leave it where it fell, hoping to deal with it when he grew stronger.

This adventure is a mystery that unfolds over the course of a game, with multiple clues and several discrete events triggered by the characters to get the players thinking. At the same time, however, the referee should avoid railroading, as players must be free to examine clues and explore the temple at their own pace, even when the results are less than ideal!

ENCOUNTER POINTS (E)

The Tash'rak Jungles are deep and largely uncharted, being occupied by the usual flora and fauna, but also dinosaurs and unique versions of traditional creatures, including the urshags (jungle orcs) and gor-koruk (trolls), both deadlier and more intelligent than their cousins. Random encounters are more common when venturing off the main roads. Furthermore, although specific encounters are few in the temple, the map provides multiple encounter points where the referee can roll randomly, marked here as (E):

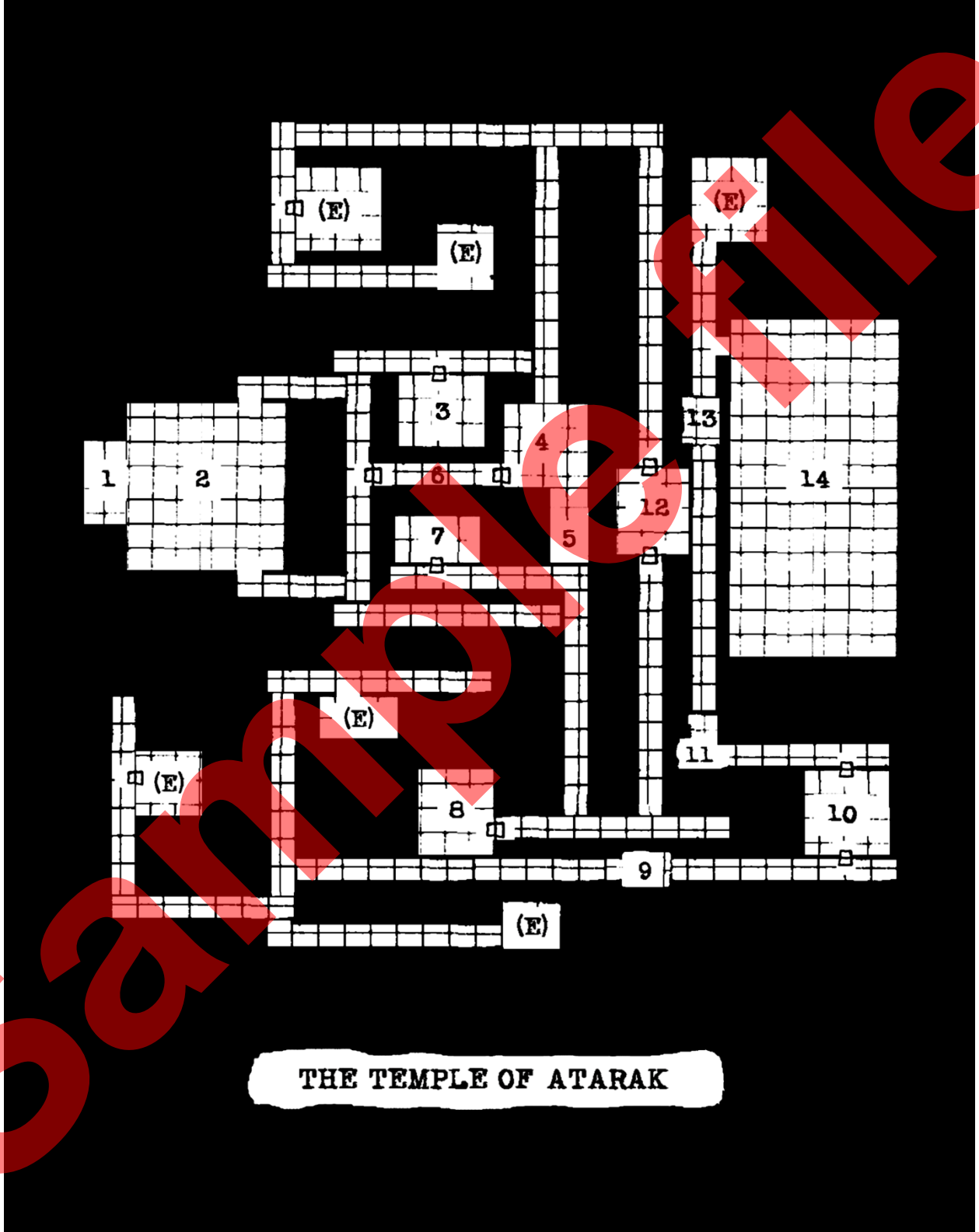
2d6	NAME	ATTACKS	LEVEL	MOVE	NUMBER	SIZE
2-3	Ape	1	3 (5 HP)	40'	1-2	M
4	Army ants	3	3 (7 HP)	30'	1	M
5-6	Cougar	3	4 (6 HP)	40'	1-2	M
7	Gor-koruk	1	6 (12 HP)	30'	1	H
8-9	Lizard, giant	1	3 (7 HP)	30'	1-2	M
10	Spider*	1	1 (1 HP)	10'	1-2	S
11-12	Urshag gang#	1	1 (1/+1 HP)	40'	1d6+4	M

*Assume tarantulas or similar, each with 1-3d6 poison

#Patrolling orcs armed with bows/daggers and clad in leather

Note: The referee can refer to the following for enemies listed in this adventure: Attacks (AK/type used), Level (LL/attack bonus/HP), Move (ME/armor worn), Size (SE/damage bonus), by class/weapon (*) where applicable.

Assume a 1-3 in 1d6 chance of an encounter at locations where enemies are indicated, noting that these are a useful means of extending the adventure and fleshing things out. Alternately, with this in mind, the referee can simply assign some encounter when a party reaches the indicated point (E), taking care to vary this enough to maintain a sense of urgency and hidden danger...



Sample file

LEVEL 1: THE TEMPLE

After two days of riding, the expedition comes within a day of the temple, following an obvious trail of debris and felled trees, and comes under sudden attack from URSHAGS (jungle orcs) that slaughter multiple guards before retreating to the heavy brush. This happens quickly enough that the party need not be involved unless they make special effort to do so, stressing again that the orcs withdraw. As a result, it is prudently decided that a smaller group (i.e., the characters) would attract less notice:

AK: 1 (bows/spears) LL: 1/+0 (1 HP) ME: 50' (--) SE: M/+0 (1d6+4 total)

The party approaches the yawning entrance and the game begins, allowing players to organize their equipment and strategy. Beyond this point, strategy alone is the key to success, although role-playing opportunities abound and should be encouraged and given ample weight.

1 - A wide (20' x 20') square opening marks the entrance to the temple, carved with strange (and mostly unknown) symbols of the jungle gods:

Atarak was worshipped by an ancestral, and ultimately forgotten, tribal dominion that fell into ruin under mysterious circumstances (although some suspect Black Fox). The great wealth of this civilization, and its obvious devotion to its gods, is evidenced by the limestone construction of the temple, which would have been quarried and transported across many miles and at tremendous cost in lives and money. The temple still stands, although thick jungle vines are slowly bringing down its ancient walls.

Note that the party can always circumvent the temple and even locate the breach in area 14, below, although doing so requires a massive berth owing to the dense brush along the outer walls. Accordingly, it should take a full game day to reach the far end from either side, with random encounters being possible along the way. Should this eventually be found, all but the final encounter happens in reverse as conditions so permit.

2 - The main structure is vast such that normal torches cannot penetrate its darkness without moving at least 20' into the main chamber:

Despite its supposed long abandonment and access to the jungle, there is a rotten smell here accompanied by the buzzing of flies, for this great chamber was scene to a recent battle between several tribals and a gigantic jungle troll (GOR-KORUK), all quite dead. Upon closer inspection, the slain tribals and a single imperial (possibly a scribe) bear witness to a terrible fight, with some two dozen broken spears in the troll revealing just how hard it was to defeat it. Astute players will find the Imperial Seal on the ground.

Attempting to search the bodies will initiate the following events, each subject to the referee and the conditions at hand, noting here that entering the temple in reverse should change little:

EVENT #1 - One of the corpses rises and commands the party to leave now, repeating this warning twice. Should the party question this or attempt any other strategy, rocks will collapse to block the exit.

Note that all turning attempts will fail, and wiser clerics immediately get the impression that these are no mere undead. Otherwise, all attacks are automatically successful, although such blows will never kill or silence what is already dead. Once the stones settle and it becomes clear they cannot be removed, the following event happens:

EVENT #2 - A disembodied voice says "Fools, I am Atarak...the dead are Atarak...this temple is Atarak..." after which the DEAD TROLL is reanimated, striking the party with its great spiked club:

AK: 1 (club/fists) LL: 6/+2 (15 HP) ME: 20' (--) SE: H/+2

Note that the beast gets both the bash and sweeping moves, and its dead eyes glow red, signaling possession by Atarak.

Searching the strewn bodies turns up 500 SP, 1 ELIXIR, and 1 POTION OF HEALING along with a SMOOTH STONE in the sage's satchel. There is also an open journal lying on the ground with but one page remaining:

CLUE #1 - "Paid some locals to help me bring it back..."

The remaining words are obscured by blood, although the referee might allow human magicians a Read spell to identify more.

An impressive, but badly-eroded, bass relief covers the easternmost wall, depicting shamanistic figures presenting a rounded stone (not unlike the one found in the scribe's bloody satchel) and driving a grotesque demon into a yawning abyss. This connection must be left to the players to draw on their own, although it obviously reveals the Binding of Atarak.

Indeed, the dead scribe is the missing Clement, and the SMOOTH STONE he carries is the KEY TO THE JAIL OF ATARAK. This divine artifact fits into the palm of the hand and is similar to elven work, although not obviously magical unless identified by any elf or (human) magician by means of a Know spell and, even then, its identity should never be revealed except through the interpretation of the various clues. Note also that destroying the key is simply impossible, being forged of an unknown (otherworldly) alloy.