

An Adventure for 3-5 Characters of 4-6th Level

by James & Robyn George





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INTRODUCTION

This volume is second in an ongoing series of Basement Adventures written exclusively for Pits & Perils; so named because it emulates the homebrew look and feel of the earliest published scenarios. Often, these were typed in someone's basement, Xeroxed off, stapled, and sold in Ziploc baggies when the hobby was new. But this is more than just a clever recreation; these scenarios are fully playable in any Pits & Perils campaign.

Note that these adventures may employ material from any of the official supplements, and the referee is encouraged to obtain them. However, they are just as free to make substitutions, etc.

BACKGROUND

Fifty years ago, the Northern Kingdoms conquered the Tash'rak Jungles, establishing a wealthy colony. And in all that time, there has been peace and relative prosperity, although some lingering resentment still shows itself among the older and more traditional tribesmen. On the balance, however, the new trade and resulting wealth has only made converts.

But recent events have broken the peace, taking the form of a mysterious, unseen force that strikes both guards and villagers alike, leaving a trampled landscape in its wake. Some of the older natives speak of an ancient power still lurking in the jungles and, possibly, originating from the ruined shrine of Atarak, an ancient god no longer worshipped.

Sensing a connection, the Provisional Governor has assembled a party of adventurers (accompanied by official escort) to explore the temple and either find and stop the evil or return with information. The reward is a horse apiece laden with 5,000 silver coins and whatever treasures they find within the ruins - all they need to do is survive its challenges! From here, the referee can insert the party using whatever devices seem appropriate to their own campaign, i.e., being hired and brought south at Imperial expense...



THE REGIONAL SEAT

Northern luxuries (and Tash'rak diamonds and spices) have to be inspected somewhere, and the Crown has special rules regarding taxes and tariffs, which ensures the Regional Seat is a bustling place. This walled town adjoins the thriving seaport of Kingsmouth and is also home to the Provisional Governor, an inherited position because there are few who want it!

The Governor's Hall (or Regional Seat) houses the Governor, his family, and assorted staff, but also maintains a sizeable garrison. This includes numerous locals, mainly holdovers from the previous (and popular) government, kept on because the new Governor is struggling and wishes to preserve some semblance of "the good old days" in the eyes of the Crown.

LOCAL PERSONALITIES

ALBRETH II is the second generation of local governors. A decent, but uninspired man, he hopes to preserve the prosperity his father won after the initial occupation and armistice, but despairs of ever doing so and is very reliant on his staff, especially Averil and the tribal Faraji.

AVERIL acts as senior ambassador. Despite his status, he deeply resents his lot in life, feeling destined for better things and easily falling prey to offers from the imprisoned Atarak, although there is no suggestion of treason from his demeanor. An aspiring court magician, he never fully mastered the arts and always looks for the easy way out.

FARAJI is perhaps the governor's most trusted advisor, being older and experienced from years at court. As a tribal, he has the trust of the people and possesses a keen understanding of the local mood. Faraji is a skilled magician (from a line of spell casters), although he relies on wisdom before spells and is non-violent unless provoked and/or necessary.

MAJESTA MARA represents the Nautical Guild, an organization that, by international treaty, protects the coastal trade routes and guards against the ever-present scourge of piracy. She is a clever and resourceful woman who keeps informants on the payroll to sell out the rest and is known to straddle the line from time to time, just short of criminal.

ALBRETH (F/L/CON) AK: 1 (long sword) LL: 2/(*) (12 HP) ME: 50' (--)

AVERIL (M/C/INT) AK: 1 (dagger) LL: 2/+0 (6 HP) ME: 50' (--) SP: 2

Optionally, Averil's magic use can remain a closely-guarded secret, making his betrayal greater. He knows the following: Bolt, Fade, Heal, and Urge.

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	l	3 (5 HP)	40'	1-2	М
4	Army ants	3	3 (7 HP)	30'	1	М
5-6	Cougar	3	4 (6 HP)	40'	1-2	М
7	Gor-koruk	l	6 (12 HP)	30'	1	H
8-9	Lizard, giant	l	3 (7 HP)	30'	1-2	М
10	Spider*	l	1 (1 HP)	10'	1-2	S
11-12	Urshag gang#	l	1 (1/+1 HP)	40'	ld6+4	М

*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...





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 Pox). 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. 3 - This empty chamber is filled with scattered, rocky debris.

4 - Dwarves entering this rubble-strewn passage have the usual chance of identifying its unstable floor, although the faintest echo of an underground stream might be discerned by wise characters.

Each individual passing through here has a cumulative 1 in 1d6 chance of opening up a pit trap leading to an underground stream. If this is triggered, everyone in the party must save or fall in, noting here that the one who actually started it always does! Victims drop 15' into the stream and attract the hungry CROCODILE that lies waiting:

AK: 1 (bite) LL: 3/+1 (9 HP) ME: 30' (--) SE: M/+0

The ground here is sufficiently wet and muddy such that feet sink 2' and movement is reduced to 10', although dexterous or strong characters can move at full speed by rolling saving dice once per combat round.

The crocodile's eyes glow a burning red, much like the troll, revealing its possession by the dark god Atarak...

Climbing from the pit takes time (1d6 turns), and the players must work out some means of doing so. The creature's filthy lair holds a skeleton wearing a RING OF LUCK with 300 SP and a POTION OF STRENGTH.

5 - Some upheaval has buckled the ceiling here, and movement beyond this point requires climbing over fallen rocks. Doing so requires 1d6+1 rounds per character, with a cumulative 1 in 1d6 chance per round of alerting the orcs quartered in area 7, below, as this is always noisy work. Optionally, and for added drama, the referee can allow the party to find another scrap of the dead scribe's journal with the following cryptic words:

CLUE #2 - "(I)s worshipped by the urshags or jungle orcs ... "

6 - This passageway is bounded by strangely-intact wooden doors and only allows for single-file movement. Both doors are open and untrapped and the narrow passageway empty, but once at least 3 characters enter, the doors slam shut and a disembodied spirit brutalizes those within. This requires all affected characters to roll saving dice once per round or suffer 1-3 hits by their unseen assailant (a manifestation of Atarak) until the door is opened and whatever magic is afoot dispersed. A frightening encounter.

Damage is resolved by rolling 1d6 (1-2: 1, 3-4: 2, 5-6: 3). The door must be attacked (no bonuses except for fighters or an axe of hewing) and takes 5 hits before opening plus one round spent climbing through the wreckage.



7 - A garrison of 10 armored URSHAGS occupy this chamber and might be encountered here or under the above-listed circumstance. These are servants of Atarak and will attack intruders on sight:

AK: 1 (bows, clubs) LL: 1/+0 (1/+1 HP) ME: 40' (leather) SE: M/+0

If one of these can slip away, they alert 1d6+4 additional urshags of equal strength who arrive after several rounds of fighting.

8 - This small chamber is largely ignored by the jungle orcs, and it is possible that some ancient magic averts even Atarak's considerable attention, making it a safe haven. Indeed, a wicked HAG has made her camp here and ventures forth on errands such that there is a 1-4 in 1d6 chance of finding the place empty when first approached. Two SKELETAL WARRIORS clad in badly-rusted chainmail with spears sit motionless against the wall, and a pair of ROTTING CORPSES lie sprawled unceremoniously.

Note that if the hag (Grizle) is met here, she will raise the skeletons by means of a special Mort spell (perhaps demonically granted) and command them to attack the party with all due haste:

AK: 1 (claws, spears) LL: 1/+0 (3/+2 HP) ME: 30' (chainmail) SE: M/+0

One round later, the corpses arise as ZOMBIES:

AK: 1 (filthy claws) LL: 1/+0 (2 HP) ME: 20' (--) SE: M/+0

Otherwise, the party will have 1d6+4 rounds to explore the chamber, finding simple cooking implements (although no campfire) and a week's rations in a badly-worn satchel. Once the hag returns, she takes the above-given course of action and then casts a reverse Glow before attempting to escape. As undead creatures are fully immune, this has no effect on their attacks and optionally, grants an additional +1 to both attacks and damage. Of course, the details of any such encounter will depend on the circumstances and the referee... The hag has a familiar (fiend) hidden in the rafters that should only be detected if the party takes specific measures. Once again, the witch has her own mission that does not include engaging meddling adventurers and will immediately attempt to escape by means of a Wink spell. Should combat become necessary, she throws a Bolt and teleports, exploiting her vast knowledge of the place to easily avoid such detection thereafter:

AK: 1 (spells) LL: 6/+0 (10 HP) ME: 50' (--) SE: M/+0 SP: 6 SPELLS: Bolt, Call, Cure, Glow (dark), Heal, Ruin, Urge, and Wink

Victorious characters will find a PORTABLE FIRE (her source of heat for cooking) and a WAND OF TRICKS. If eventually captured, a charismatic interrogator can extract an admission; she has been sent by her coven to spy on this new (potential) rival and report whatever she learns.

Of course, she will still use her wicked magic to escape. Either way, she leaves behind a torn leaf from the scribe's journal containing the following important clue from the late Clement:

CLUE #3 - "The key falls into the deep lock ..."

This area makes an excellent campsite, and the party might be allowed to recover hits and faith/spell points provided sentries are posted and supplies support a prolonged occupation. Once again, the characters secure food and water from the hag's store lasting ld6+1 days if rationed wisely.

9 - The air becomes pungent here, perhaps owing to the flooded limestone chambers that follow. There is otherwise nothing of any real interest, although dwarves (and wise characters in general) might pick up the scent of the jungle from area 10, below. The ceiling here is fallen throughout and requires all but dwarves to crouch down.

10 - Part of the low ceiling has collapsed here as well, with some of this opening to the sky, although not enough to make torches unnecessary or movement any faster and/or easier. Apparently, the heavy tropical rains have flooded this area before, exposing a bumpy limestone surface that reduces party movement to 10' and makes safe running impossible.

In fact, the westernmost end of the chamber is partially flooded (perhaps related to the underground stream), although this is very highly acidic, burning exposed flesh for 1d6+1 damage and dissolving wooden poles within an equal number of rounds. Careful examination of this reveals a grimacing skeleton in ancient bronze armor, now useless, with a strangely well-preserved LONG SWORD +1/+2 VS. ORCS and a POTION OF RESTORATION in a brass bottle hung at the skeleton's waist. These must be extracted carefully.

11 - The ceiling here remains low, although faster movement is possible, especially for dwarves and the dexterous. Assume 20' for most characters and faster ones 30', noting that this area will slow pursuing urshags and other enemies, excepting those small enough to fit.

12 - This area is brightly lit, and the party will encounter 4 large and heavily armed URSHAGS gathered around a central bonfire. These are clad in tribal body paint and armed with axes. They defer to a large specimen who rises to confront the characters and triggers the following:

EVENT #3 - A disembodied voice says: "You have come this far, but no more will you thwart my plans", after which a red mist enters the large orc, assuming all the signs of possession and initiating a vicious battle with the frenzied servants of the terrible Atarak.

The possessed urshag (Tork) acts as a 1st level fighter:

AK: 1 (great axe) LL: 1/(*) (10 HP) ME: 50' (--) SE: M/+0

All others attack at +1 so long as their leader is within sight:

AK: 1 (claws, hand axe) LL: 1/(*) (3 HP) ME: 50' (--) SE: M/+0

If slain, the party finds an iron chest with 500 SP opened by a key hung around Tork's neck. Optionally, his mighty axe operates at +1, although only in his hands, effectively supplementing his fighter status and making him equal to a small jungle troll in melee.

13 - At this point, anyone will smell the fresh air and hear noises that signify the outside world, and the referee should describe rapidly increasing light with every step. Good descriptions will set the mood here.

14 - This chamber is open to the sky and the northern wall has collapsed, revealing the jungle beyond. To the south, beneath two columns, is a circular well or raised dais with a huge stone slab across it. A pale glow emanates from this, matching that from the newly-shining key...

The slab must be removed and the key thrown down the narrow shaft to the hidden prison below. Once the party recognizes this, 12 URSHAG archers pour into the chamber from outside, intercepting the party and preventing them from reaching the dais to complete their mission:

AK: 1 (bows, clubs) LL: 1/+0 (2/+1 HP) ME: 40' (leather) SE: M/+0

The referee should judge this carefully to make it more of an obstacle.

Should a party reach the dais, Atarak will arrive in the form of a clearly possessed (and hungry) TYRANNOSAURUS REX:

AK: 1 (bite, claws) LL: 7/+2 (18 HP) ME: 30' (--) SE: L/+1

This will harass the party and try to keep them from sliding off the stone, noting that, optionally, it gets a second attack with its 30' long tail that requires saving dice to avoid being knocked over and treated as prone for the next combat round (dexterous characters may add +1).

It will take 2-3 "normal" characters or a single strong one to slide the massive stone slab, with only incremental progress possible. For added drama, this requires 5 non-consecutive successful attempts and an additional round dropping the glowing key down the shaft.

With this act, Atarak's disembodied spirit is imprisoned anew, and a red mist rises from the dinosaur and spirals down the long shaft accompanied by a scream of impotent, ground-shaking rage. The mysterious source of the attacks has been found, and the party is free to loot, finding 20,000 CP in twin clay pots along with pearl strands worth 500 GP total.

If time is running out at the table, a surviving tyrannosaur leaves, dazed from the experience. However, if time remains, this will attempt to attack the party, although hit points are reduced. Otherwise, a HAG appears and uses magic to conjure vines and hold the beast so the party can escape, summoning a powerful storm to bury the dais (and the key) for good...

Note that this hag may or may not be the one encountered in the temple, depending on previous events. Either way, she takes pains to convey peaceful intentions and gratitude to the party, although there is a hint of evil as befits her craft. After thanking the characters for stopping a rival to their demonic master (something that should concern lawful clerics), she vanishes noisily in a puff of noxious brimstone. What remains of the old temple might still contain treasure and enemies, although this is left to the referee.



Optionally, the referee can have the party locate a final bloody fragment of the late scribe's journal stuck on a nearby branch:

CLUE #4 - "(W)ill have to tell the Governor of his betrayal ... "

This references Averil's plot, but leaves it open for the players to solve the mystery in whatever way the game supports.

EPILOGUE AND AFTERMATH

The characters rejoin the waiting escort and, upon safely returning to civilization, report their success. Averil will have already sensed Atarak's defeat and is counting on the party's ignorance, going so far as to feign friendship to discover what they know. If the truth is somehow revealed, he attacks the party with new powers from his wicked pact:

LL: 3/+0 (7 HP) SP: 4 SPELLS: Bolt, Fade, Heal, Ruin, and Urge

The newly-empowered magician has a DEMON WAND, likely obtained through whatever deal was struck, and will use this to call a GUARDIAN DEMON of the xenoform variety to distract (and destroy) the party:

AK: 1-5 (growing tendrils) LL: 4/+1 (12 HP) ME: 40' (--) SE: L/+1

Note that Averil will attempt to engage on his own terms and that his guardian grows a new tendril each round until the full amount (5) is available against the party. This is a difficult fight, as the magician uses Bolt and perhaps Ruin to deal some damage before retreating. Optionally, the referee can have Faraji or Majesta lend a hand...

ORIGINAL ENEMIES

Tash'rak is home to the following primitive variants, noting that these will correspond to the original types except where noted below:

NAME	ATTACKS	LEVEL	MOVE	SIDE	SIZE	NUMBER	TREASURE
Gor-Koruk	1(*)	6	30'	C	H	1-2	
Urshag	1(*)	1	(*)	C	М	6-12	B/I

GOR-KORUKS are jungle-adapted trolls and deadly foes, enjoying the bash and sweeping moves owing to their incredible size.

The URSHAG tribe is orcish in the truest sense, but more intelligent and cleverly adapted, working as thieves in the jungle and using superior strategy against their enemies. They are especially fond of bows and missiles.

REFEREE NOTES