

A Lesson in Scripture

A D&D 5E side quest set in the Forgotten Realms

The elves of Neverwinter Wood, and their Feywild cousins, have long sought the legendary Xanfael Scripture. Such a discovery might mean that a lasting peace could be brokered between the mortal world and the land of faerie. Yet there are many who do not want peace, and this leads an elven commander to secretly seek another way to acquire the document without drawing attention. She is looking for adventurers who are prepared to risk all and deny everything if they get caught. Know anybody like that?

A 2-3 hour adventure for 3rd level characters

by BRUCE PARIS



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LONG AGO, THE GREAT FEY EMPIRE OF ILLEFARN COVERED MUCH OF NORTHWESTERN FAERUN, INCLUDING NEVERWINTER WOOD. *This kingdom fell to ruin over the centuries, but deep in the wood linger the remains of that nation's capital city, Sharandar. Now, as marauders plunge deep into Neverwinter Wood, they have aroused some descendants of Illefarn who are trickling back from the Feywild, eager to reclaim their heritage and to write a saga of vengeance in the blood of outsiders.*

The fey knight, Merrisara Winterwhite, commands the elven forces from the Feywild, but she spends most of her time in the mortal world, restoring the ruins of old Sharandar and trying to keep her angrier warriors in check.

—Matt Sernett et.al, *Neverwinter Campaign Setting*

The characters are camped on the outskirts of Neverwinter Wood and word goes around that they are looking for work. Seizing an opportunity, Merrisara Winterwhite (an elven noble) summons the characters to her temporary encampment. Merrisara explains that many of her elven comrades would prefer to take Sharandar by force and use their strength to push further into surrounding lands. She, however, believes that such violence is contrary to the original long lost scriptures written by the High Priest Xanfael during the time of the Great Empire.

Merrisara thinks she has discovered the last known location of the Xanfael Scripture: an abandoned Temple of Corellon, deep within the ruins of old Sharandar. She believes that possession of such a scripture might soften the hearts of her political overseers and usher in a new direction for the Illefarn descendants. She asks the characters if they would seek and appropriate the lost scripture for her, as such a bold personal attempt would be viewed as treachery in the eyes of those who seek to usurp her.

Should the characters agree to work for Merrisara, she tells them what she knows about the Temple of Corellon and what her advance scouts have discovered. If they decline, she politely bids them good day.

Getting into the Temple

Merrisara believes the Xanfael Scripture is on the top floor of the Temple of Corellon (**Area 7 on the Map**), allegedly hidden “beneath a stone floor tile covered in a leafy pattern”. The temple itself is partially ruined, but still sits atop a huge redwood tree and access is via a stairway that winds around the outside of the tree.

The only problem is that recently this part of old Sharandar was invaded by an orc hoard and the orcs have posted a patrol that have made camp at the base of the

old temple. The orc patrol consists of seven **orcs** at the base of the temple, whilst two **orcs** patrol the upper temple to use it as a lookout. Advance scouts also report there are rumors the orcs have enlisted the support of a **manticore** that has a lair nearby (in return for a share in any treasure they loot from the ruins). The scouts never saw the manticore and there is some conjecture as to whether the rumor is actually true.

Merrisara suggests that a full frontal assault on the temple via the orc camp is possible, but challenging – particularly if the alleged manticore decides to make an appearance. There is nothing stopping heroic characters from taking this approach if they wish, and the combat, whilst hard, is certainly winnable.

Merrisara, however, also suggests an alternative route. Whilst on patrol, her scouts discovered a nearby treetop tomb devoted to elven nobility. The scouts revealed that a treetop walkway links the tomb with the upper level of the temple. There is, however, no obvious doorway leading from inside the tomb onto the walkway.

Merrisara thinks that if the characters could find a way to open the door that leads from inside the tomb to the walkway then they could sneak along the walkway and enter the temple from above, thus bypassing the orc patrol down below. Of course, they would still need to deal with the two orcs guarding the upper temple.

That said, Merrisara warns the characters that entering such an ancient elven tomb has its own challenges and characters should be prepared that this route may be more deadly than facing a few orcs in their makeshift camp.

Finally, Merrisara promises the party a 100 gp reward for returning the Scripture to her, and she gives the characters a Potion of Comprehend Languages, in case they need it to discern any elven runes in the temple or the tomb.

Temple Entry via the Orc Camp

Merrisara's scouts can only lead the characters so far into old Sharandar, and then point them in the direction of the temple and/or the elven tomb. At this point, the DM may need to refer to the map found in the Appendix and adjust what the characters see and experience based on their plan of action (which they should preferably decide upon before proceeding).

If the characters decide on an all-out assault on the orc camp (or some other plan involving getting past the orcs at the base of the temple), then use the read aloud text and information below. You can also use this description if the characters decide to scout the camp themselves before doubling back to the elven tomb. It should be noted that the elven tomb is encountered *before* the orc camp (temple), so characters who decide to enter via the tomb only ever see the orc camp from a hazy distance when they eventually step out onto the treetop walkway (unless they specifically state they are scouting the camp beforehand).

Read aloud the following text aloud when the characters first see the orc encampment up close:

At the base of the abandoned temple, a band of seven orcs have made camp. Three of them are snoozing lazily against the base of the large redwood tree, whilst the other four sit around a campfire prodding meat on a spit that looks horribly like human remains. Nearby, in a cage, a little girl sits crying uncontrollably.

“Daddy! No!” she screams, her eyes fixated upon the slowly simmering rotisserie.

“Shut up, little girl,” an orc interjects, “We’re only saving you so we can eat you next breakfast with chips an’ eggs!”

Armed with this information, the characters may choose to immediately attack the seven orcs and free the child (the key to the cage is in the pocket of the meanest-looking orc), or they may plan to enter the temple via the tomb, and then deal with the orcs later (knowing that the child is in no immediate danger). If combat breaks out, it takes the (3) sleeping orcs one round to realise what’s going on and join the melee. The orcs cannot be bargained with (though the characters can try); however, they might be tricked into leaving their post should the characters come up with a decent deception (vs. orc Insight checks, etc.).

The girl’s name is Irinee, and her father was a ranger named Barsellus. They have lived and hunted in the woods around old Sharandar for many years. Yesterday, they were unfortunately caught by the orcs who moved into this district a few weeks ago. Sadly, Barsellus was slain and is currently rotating on the spit. If rescued, Irinee is clearly distraught but manages to impart that she now has only one living relative, Auntie Aginta, who lives nearby in the City of Neverwinter. She would be grateful if the party escorted her there.

After the PCs deal with the orcs at the base of the temple they are free to climb the stairs to the platform (Area 9). There is no door here, just an archway. Go to Inside the Temple (where they still have to deal with two orcs guards).

Temple Entry via the Tomb (Area 1)

The noble’s tomb sits atop a large redwood tree, and is discovered by the characters *before* they reach the orc camp. The orc camp can’t be seen from here at ground level (though smoke from a campfire can be seen and smelt at this distance). Also, ask the PCs to make a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to hear the distraught cries and screams of a young girl coming from the direction of the orc camp.

To reach the top of the tree, it is an easy climb up a partially ruined staircase. There’s no need to make skill

checks, but you can prey on character’s paranoia by describing the staircase as “ancient, rotting and wobbly”.

At the top of the stairs (Area 1) is a curved wooden doorway, flush with the bark of the great tree. It’s not trapped, but it does require a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to figure out how to open it (a combination of hidden latches and push/pull/lifts). The door can’t be bashed down via brute strength. This is why the tomb hasn’t yet been plundered by the stupid orcs (or anyone else). If the characters fail to get inside the tomb, they still have the option of entering the temple via the orc camp. If any character tries to climb a tree to get onto the walkway without going through the tomb, an invisible (magic) barrier prevents him/her from getting onto it.

Inside the Elven Temple (Area 2-4)

Once inside the great tree, the characters discover an ancient elven tomb, just as they expected. The secret door (Area 5) is invisible, though clever players can deduce it must be there due to the location of the walkway on the outside. The door won’t be revealed until the characters solve the riddle in Area 3. Around the southern wall of the tomb (Area 2) are seven upright sarcophagi. In each sarcophagus is a skeleton of elvish descent. They are clad in regal wrappings, though there is nothing of value (if searched). Around the northern wall (Area 3) are three similar sarcophagi – though the skeletons here are dressed more regally, and the centre skeleton has a golden crown on its head (worth approx. 100 gp).

At the base of the centre skeleton (Area 3) is a dais with a large compass. The arrow on the compass is pointing north, but looks like it can be moved. There is a dust-covered plaque on the dais that reads (in Elvish):

To know who we are, we must remember from whence we came. The First of us hailed from Evermeet. Next came those who were exiled from beyond the Endless Wastes. Soon after, brethren borne in tall ships sailed ‘cross the Trackless Sea. And then the last of us journeyed far from the Spine of the World. Remembrance begets life - forgetfulness, death!

This puzzle can be solved by characters moving the arrow on the compass to the correct direction in each part of the riddle in order: Evermeet (West), Endless Wastes (East), Trackless Sea (South), and Spine of the World (North). Players might know the answers themselves, or each character can make a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check to know the correct answer to all parts.

If the characters solve the puzzle correctly, the secret door in Area 5 opens. If they fail to solve the puzzle, then the floor (Inner Green Circle) suddenly opens up and any characters standing in this area fall into a Spiked Pit Trap (Area 4). If you are not using miniatures, then

there is a 50% chance that any character in the tomb falls into the 20ft deep pit. Characters can make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to leap to safety before falling, but those who fall take 6 (2d6) falling damage, plus a further 11 (2d10) piercing damage from the spikes at the bottom. The floor closes and resets once everybody leaves the tomb (and the puzzle can be tried again). The trap itself is magically concealed, so no ordinary Perception check uncovers it. The secret door stays open for 24 hours (and can't be closed).

If by any chance a character steals anything from the tomb, or does anything unsanctimonious, then the ten **skeletons** in Areas 2 & 3 rise up and attack the party (not good).

All being well, the characters can now move clandestinely along the treetop walkway towards the temple.

Near the Temple (via Walkway)

This event only occurs if the PCs ignored (or did not realise) the plight of Irinee and/or had not tried to rescue her.

As the characters reach the western walkway leading to **Area 7**, they can each make another DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to hear something way down below at the base of the big tree:

“Help! Help me! Please!”

It is the sound of a young girl crying.

Then comes the grunt of an orcish voice in response:

“Shut up! You're going to get all sweaty before I cook you! If there's one thing I can't stand, it's sweaty meat!”

The PCs can, of course, choose to stay on task and ignore the plight of Irinee. They can deal with the orc guards inside the temple first, then run down and rescue Irinee; or they might choose to grab the scripture, fight the manticore and then double back to help Irinee escape. The players can choose and the DM should help play this out in the best (most) heroic fashion.

If *none* of the PCs *ever* hear Irinee's cries for help, then they will automatically hear them as they leave the Elven Tomb (as they exit after the manticore fight). How they react is up to them.

Inside the Temple (Area 7)

There are two **orcs** guarding the inside of the treetop temple (**Area 7**). The characters may choose to try and surprise them, or simply opt for an all-out assault. Either way, just as the last orc dies or falls unconscious, he retrieves a horn and blows it (loudly at first, then it comedically toots less and less as he expires). The orcs down in the camp are too busy sleeping or eating to hear the horn – but it arouses the attention of a nearby ally of

the orcs: a **manticore** (who will arrive soon at a cinematically appropriate climactic moment).

The Xanfael Scriptures are secretly hidden under a leafy tile on the western side of the temple. There are, however, dozens of *different* “leafy tile” designs on the floor of this room! The leaf on the scripture tile is from a Bruneal tree – one of the few trees that grow *both* in the mortal world *and* the Feywild. PCs can discover this by making a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check, or a DC 12 Intelligence (History) check. It only takes the characters a round or two to prize up the leafy tile (**Area 8**) and retrieve the Xanfael Scriptures (which lie wrapped in a cloth in a compartment beneath the tile).

Escaping the Temple

The PCs then need to make their escape. If the party escapes via the walkway, have the **manticore** meet and fight them on the treetop platform (**Area 6**). The orcs below are only alerted when the manticore wails as it dies.

Should the party be victorious, they can exit via the elven tomb before the orc camp reaches them in pursuit. If they haven't yet heard or rescued Irinee, they hear her cries at this point in time and may choose to act (or not). If they do not, in the scuffle to chase the party, one of the orcs drops the key to Irinee's cage, which allows the little girl to use a stick to procure it and escape!

If the characters leave the temple via the door at the base of the temple tree, then they will find themselves in the orc camp and will have to fight both the seven orcs plus the guardian manticore at ground level (very deadly). If the party entered via the orc camp to start with, then they only fight the manticore at ground level when they reach the camp at the bottom of the temple redwood tree.

Rewards

Experience

- Total up all **combat experience** earned for defeated foes, and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. For **solving the puzzle and not setting off the trap** award each character 50 xp.

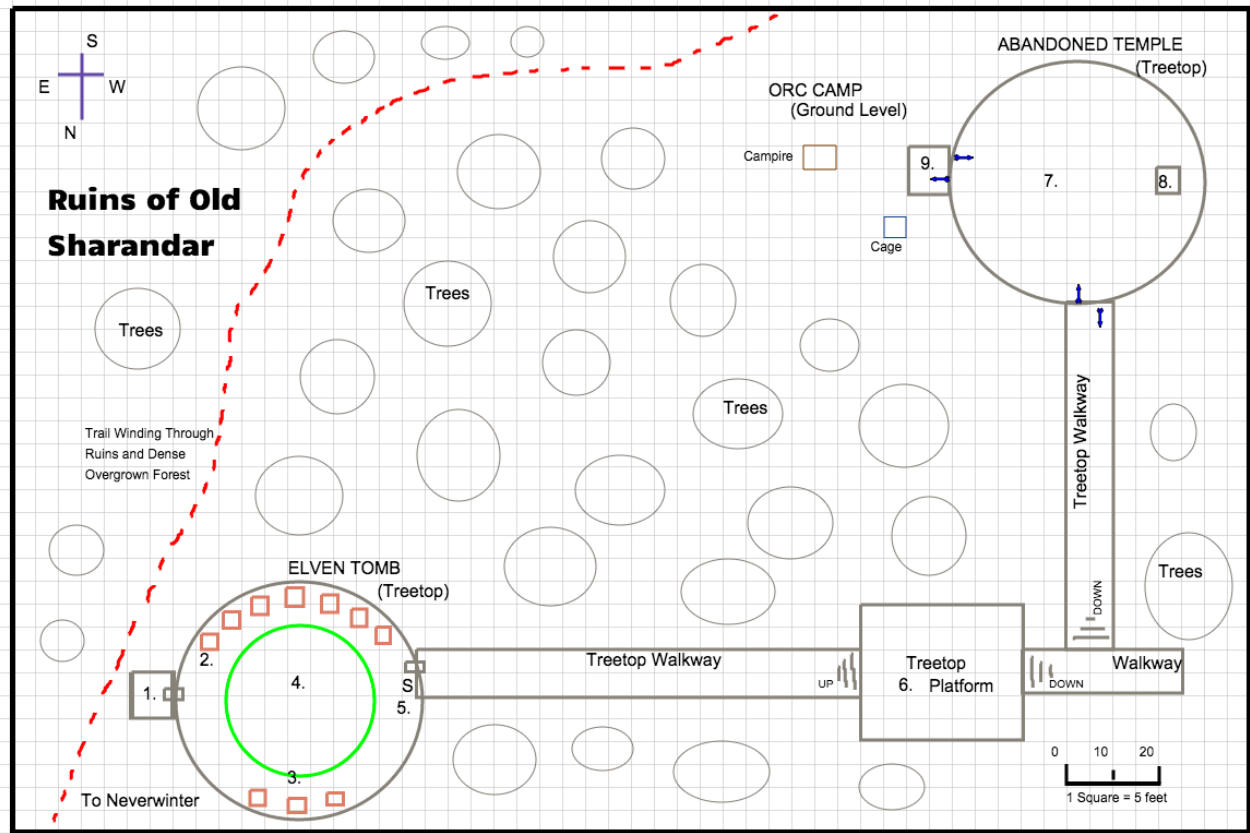
Treasure

- Returning the Scripture to Merrisara: 100 gp total.
- If the characters specifically remember and state they are travelling to Neverwinter to reunite Irinee with her Aunt, the party is rewarded by the Aunt (an elderly ranger, now retired) with an appropriate Uncommon magic item chosen by the DM.

Renown (if applicable)

All faction members earn one renown point for participating in these encounters. Emerald Enclave members earn one additional renown point if the party rescued Irinee and later organised a proper burial for her ranger father.

Appendix 1 – Map of Old Sharandar (Temple Area)



Note: In the map above, true North is placed at the *bottom* of the map, rather than at the (traditional) top of the map. This is particularly important to remember when orienting players to figure out the puzzle in the Elven Tomb.

Appendix 2 – Monster/NPC Statistics

Orc

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (hide armor)

Hit Points 15 (2d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 16 (+3) **DEX** 12 (+1) **CON** 16 (+3) **INT** 7 (-2)

WIS 11 (+0) **CHA** 10 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Actions

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Skeleton

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 10 (+0) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 15 (+2) **INT** 6 (-2)

WIS 8 (-1) **CHA** 5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Manticore

Large monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor) **Hit Points** 68 (8d10 + 24) **Speed** 30 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR 17 (+3) **DEX** 16 (+3) **CON** 17 (+3) **INT** 7 (-2)

WIS 12 (+1) **CHA** 8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Tail Spike Regrowth. The manticore has twenty-four tail spikes. Used spikes regrow when the manticore finishes a long rest.

Actions

Multiattack. The manticore makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws or three with its tail spikes.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Tail Spike. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 100/200 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.