

INTRODUCTION

MECC3: Knaves of Nefford, the third in Mithgarthr Entertainment's new Castles & Crusades line, should be played through before setting your players free to explore the greater realm of Imlar. It doesn't need to happen directly after MECC2 (for instance, if you have added adventures of your own for the PCs to embark on in the valley), however it *does* need to have occurred before the PCs leave the valley, as a major paradigm shift in spell availability occurs at the end of this adventure – the PCs, and the campaign setting in general, will lose access to the spells *Raise Dead* and *Resurrection*.

In this module, the PCs are hired by the Church of Erm to recover a relic known as *Erm's Laughter* which has been stolen. They'll have to follow clues all over town to track the relic and its absconders, eventually finding themselves exploring the sewers beneath Nefford. There they'll discover that a cult of Orcus is responsible for the theft, and their intention was much darker than mere monetary gain.

ERM'S LAUGHTER

Erm's Laughter, a relic of the Church of Erm, has been stolen; it must be restored to its rightful place in the Great Cathedral or doom could fall upon the entirety of Vaedz'Eb!

For thousands of years, the spells *Raise Dead* and *Resurrection* weren't known to the clerics of the world, regardless of the gods they followed. The spell *Wish* is only known to have been used thrice in history by the faithful of Erm to try and bring back someone from the dead but all three times it ended with unintended results, and after the third incident Erm herself appeared to decree to her followers that though done with good intentions, this manner of trying to cheat death was an affront to her gift of life, as death is a natural part of life.

Thirty-nine years ago, in 229 PS, Hagen Reid succumbed to the allure of the power that Orcus promises after finding old, hidden relics and texts related to Sra'ha. As it turns out, Sra'ha was never a goddess of death and a counterpart of the goddess of life Erm. "She" was just a manifestation of Orcus, which he used to try and destroy Erm's church. While he knew he'd be unable to revive the worship of Sra'ha within the Church, he found another way to subvert Erm's faithful. During his studies, Orcus revealed to the archbishop the spells *Raise Dead* and *Resurrection*. He began teaching the spells to clerics of Erm, under the guise of having been revealed the spell by Erm herself. Most regarded the spells as miraculous. Unlike the magic of *Wish*, these spells seemed to bring the dead back to life without any horrific side effects or consequences. And, after almost forty years of this spell being used, Erm never appeared to tell her followers otherwise.

The reason for this, however, is that Hagen had a relic known as *Erm's Laughter* secretly removed from its holy shrine within the Cathedral just a few short months after learning the news spells, back in the year 230 PS. With this relic gone from the Church and magicked by



the cultists of Orcus, Erm has been unable to directly communicate with her flock to warn them against the use of these spells.

After being tasked by Ob MacKie to recover the relic, the PCs will have to then track down its location and recover it from those holding it, all while discovering and collecting evidence to prove that Hagen Reid is the man responsible for the entire mess.

THE MISSING RELIC

There are many vaults and chambers beneath the Great Cathedral of Erm, and quite a few of them house various different relics of the Church. There is rarely a need for the clergy to visit most of the chambers, as the items that are used often in yearly rites and such are kept in the nearest rooms.

As fate would have it, Father Ob had made it a personal goal to visit and reflect upon all of the relics and items in the vaults during the course of this year. Needless to say, he was absolutely shocked three days ago when he discovered that Erm's Laughter was missing.

He immediately consulted with his two closest friends in the Church (which thankfully doesn't include Hagen), and decided to hire a group of trustworthy adventurers to hopefully recover the relic with discretion. They figured a best case scenario would be getting the relic back without the news of its theft ever having gotten out to the parishioners, in hopes of avoiding any mass panic or fear.

As luck would have it, Sister Ariabelle Rosefall arrived in Nefford the day after Ob discovered that the relic was missing. Father MacKie will arrange for Ariabelle to contact the PCs, and gather them at the Great Cathedral for a meeting.

Sister Ariabelle Rosefall

4th level cleric

AC: 19 hp: 26 MV: 30' AL: LG

Str: 13 Dex: 16 Con: 11

Int: 12 Wis: 17 Cha: 16

Ariabelle will not be able to accompany the PCs during their initial attempt to locate the relic, as she's currently on other Church business and her vows would not permit her to set them aside for this. However, once the PCs have discovered the Temple of Orcus, she will gladly help them try to wipe out that filth if they ask her (as her vows to defend the Church against the machinations of the Prince of Undeath trump any other vows she may have taken). When outfitted for battle, she wears *Plate Mail +1*, a medium steel shield, and wields a *Light Mace +1, +3 vs. Evil*. She will have the spells *Detect Magic*, *First Aid (x2)*, *Light*, *Cure Light Wounds (x2)*, *Protection From Evil*, *Hold Person*, and *Silence* prepared.

Ob will offer a monetary reward of 5,000gp with no tithe expected out of any loot recovered along the way, and will additionally send them with a scroll containing three *Cure Serious Wounds* spells on it, or three *Potions of Cure Serious Wounds* if the party doesn't have a cleric. Unlike Ariabelle, Ob's vows as head of the Church keep him fully bound from dangerous adventures.

If none of the PCs were involved with saving Ariabelle (for example, *I run two different groups, both playing in the same world, and the group who played this adventure wasn't the same group who had explored Fallsbarrow in Brink to save Ariabelle*), Father MacKie puts out word to **Tund Bronzebottom** at the Loud Rabbit, **Morriana Stillsong** at the Angel's Helm, and **Fontane Bulur** of the Quiet Swordsman to keep their eyes out for a group of adven-

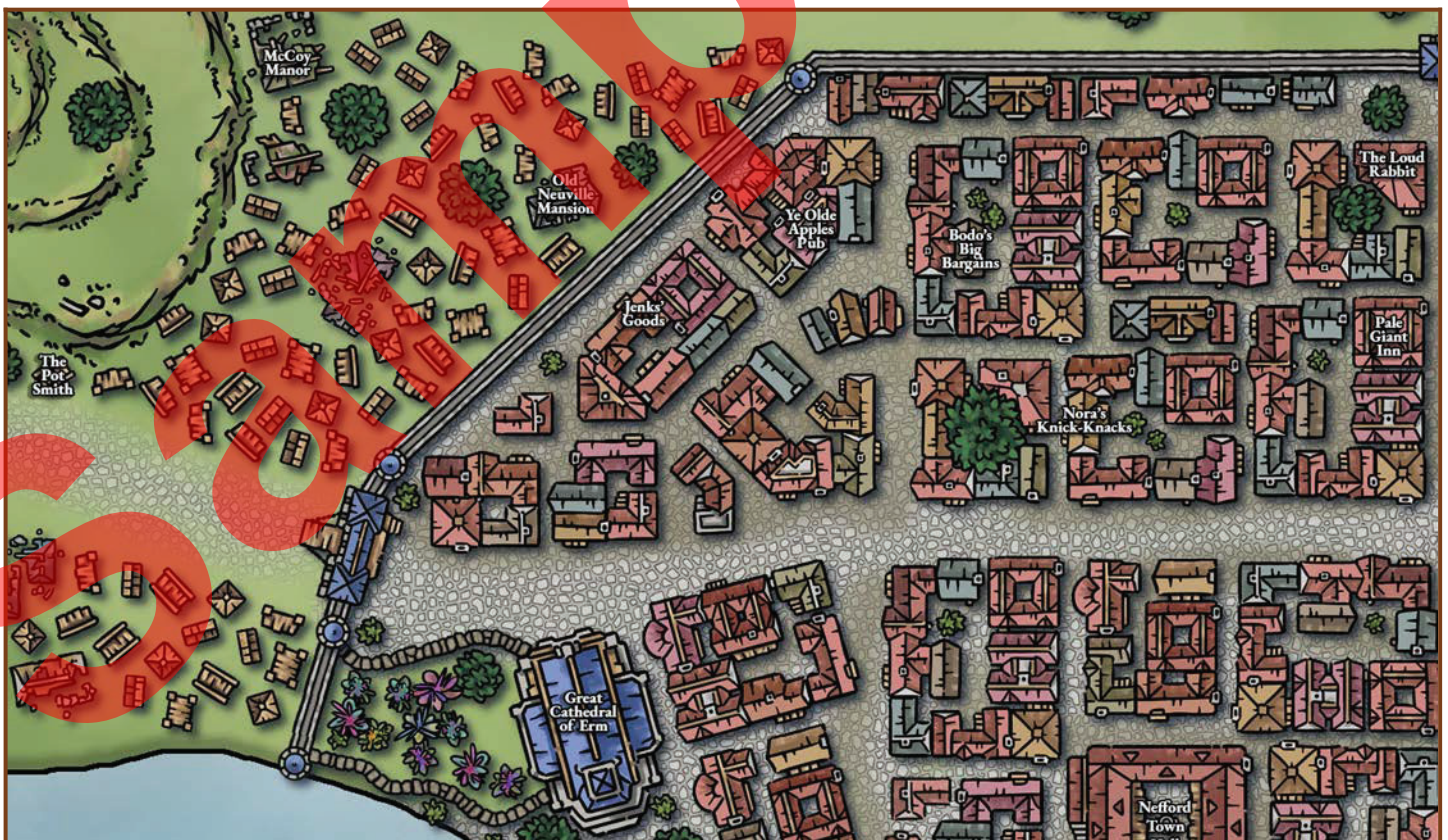
turers who seem not only capable of the mission, but morally aligned to it. The pay is 5,000gp. When an acceptable party is found, they're to be directed to meet with Ob at the cathedral.

The relic itself is a circular disc of platinum, with an ivory relief of a smiling Erm in the center. Ob tells the party that there were obvious marks on the base to which the relic was affixed from where it was pried off, and he also found a cheap iron dagger which had been dropped at the scene which he gladly gives to the PCs to examine as evidence.

Ob believes, because of what he found, that bandits must have sneaked in to the Church some late night and stole it, hoping for some quick coin. He suggests that perhaps the PCs should visit some of the less reputable locations in the city to see if anyone has tried to sell it, at least as a start. He also suggests trying to track down the blacksmith who made the dagger, though he admits that's a long shot.

FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

Most shops and taverns of the type Father MacKie was referring to are located in Old Nefford, since Wenwic Corner, Kneetown, and especially Westgarden maintain a higher standard. The PCs will need to be discreet as they're looking, though. Not only will Ob have asked them to keep the details of their mission a secret, but if they make too much noise in their search, they may attract the attention of **The Sect of Twilight** much earlier than needed. That said, it doesn't take too much asking around for shops which sell "questionable" goods before a few places are mentioned: **Jenk's Goods**, **Nora's Knick-Knacks**, **Bodo's Big Bargains**, and **Ye Olde Apples Pub**.



Jenk's Goods

This little shop occupies a small space in the rear of a larger building. Its only entrance is in the back alley of the block of buildings surrounding it. It is owned by **Jenk Groth**, a thin, greasy old man with long black hair and a beaked nose. He can be genuinely nice to his friends and regular customers, but is otherwise a vile and miserable fellow.

A small and ramshackle affair, Jenk has been running his shop for the better part of 50 years now. While well established, he is not much more than a low-level fence dealing in simple stolen goods from the local pickpockets and petty thieves. Jenk doesn't recognize the dagger, and has neither seen nor heard anything about Erm's Laughter.

He is, however, good friends with **Norman Woodley** over at Ye Olde Apples Pub, and is a member of the Sect of Twilight (though he's not involved deep enough to have anything to do with, or know anything about, their involvement with Orcus). Unless the PC(s) who interact with Jenk are already established in the underside of Nefford, or otherwise do a phenomenal job of finding out what he does or doesn't know about Erm's Laughter (whether by great role-play from the player, or good dice rolls in the case of Charisma checks – CL 8 or there about), Jenk will certainly let Norman know that there are “goody-goodies” sticking their noses in his business as soon as he gets a chance.

Nora's Knick-Knacks

Nora Crabapple is a petite older woman whose been running this thrift shop for almost two decades. Her husband was an adventurer, and she became a widow when he and his crew were eaten by a dragon. Nora used their savings to open this shop to cater to the less fortunate citizens of Nefford. Not only does she sell used clothing and household items for very cheap, but she often feeds those who need a hot meal.

Since there is so often a relatively large amount of destitute folks congregating at Nora's shop, it has an (untrue) reputation as being a place where shady business occurs. Mrs. Crabapple, a normally reserved, reflective woman, will get incredibly upset and combative if it is implied that her business could have anything to do with criminal activity.

Bodo's Big Bargains

Bodo Vogt is an incredibly obese, balding older man, with hollow eyes and who always smells of stale beer and vinegar. His shop, which he's owned and operated for almost forty years, specializes in cheap, low-quality items. He sells most items on the General Equipment list from the *Player's Handbook*, save holy symbols, for 20% cheaper than list price. However, there's a 1 in 6 chance when an item purchased from Bodo is used, it will break. Bodo's attitude is already caustic on any given day, and woe be to anyone who comes back to complain that something has broken.

Although his slimy business practices have earned him the reputation of running a questionable business, he does not deal in stolen goods, nor is he involved in

any way with the Sect of Twilight. He won't be offended if asked about such things, though, and will just tell the PCs to seek out “that old bastard Jenk.” He does, however, recognize the smith's mark on the dagger as being that of “the Pot Smith.”

The Pot Smith

Located on the western edge of Gorgeknot is a little smithy ran by a seemingly frail yet surprisingly strong old man named **Edmund Wells**. While Edmund's arms have remained strong into his twilight years, his mind, not so much.

He'll happily tell the PCs that he remembers every dagger he's ever made and sold, and seems to instantly recognize the blade. However, when he begins telling the story about it, he rambles on and on and jumps from subject to subject without ever actually talking about selling this, or any dagger.

Edmund obviously doesn't remember every dagger he's ever sold, and likely doesn't even remember what he had for breakfast this morning.

Ye Old Apples Pub

Dirty, smoky, and more than a little run-down, Ye Old Apples Pub is a drinking hole that is almost never empty. It attracts clientele mostly from Old Nefford and Gorgeknot, both law-abiding and miscreant. While there is a goodly amount of nefarious activity which takes place here, there's also a goodly amount of regular patrons who are just poor folks from the area who are trying to forget about life for a while.

The pub's proprietor is a bald, stocky, middle-aged man named **Norman Woodley**. Norman is an adept in the Sect of Twilight, and has dedicated himself to Orcus. Though he'll never admit it to the PCs, he is well aware of the relic and why it was stolen, as he himself was involved with its removal and the dark ceremony which was performed in Orcus' hidden temple to prevent Erm from communicating with her faithful.

The PCs will need to be extremely careful in how they conduct themselves in this location, especially if they visited Jenk first and he's had time to talk to Norman. Of course bluntly asking around about Erm's Laughter will have Norman sending agents of the Sect of Twilight after the party almost immediately, but even just wearing the colors and symbols of the Church in the establishment will set off alarm bells (clerics and paladins would be wise to wear normal clothes while following clues).

Once Norman has reason to be suspicious of the PCs, he'll tell them that just a month prior he overheard some “sinister looking fellows” talking about stashing away “their big score from the Church” somewhere safe until they could find a buyer. He then tells them that he had one of his bar-backs secretly follow this group of ne'er-do-wells who saw them sneak into the old Neville mansion in Gorgeknot. He'll give directions to the mansion if the PCs are unfamiliar with it. “Leave out through the west gate, and follow the wall. It's about halfway between the two wall towers, and easily the largest ruin in Gorgeknot; you can't miss it.”

This is, of course, a complete fabrication. Immediately after feeding this story to the party, Norman will excuse himself to the back (“Apologies friends, I have things that need attending to; this job is never-ending!”), and will dispatch a group of thugs from the Sect of Twilight who’re stationed at the pub to ambush the party at the old ruined house, using the sewers to arrive there before the party.

The Old Neuville Mansion

Before Gorgeknot became the slum it is today, the first few manors to be constructed there assumed the area would become a well-to-do expansion of Nefford. This of course never came to be, and now the handful of once-grand homes which had been built here now stand in ruins.

Though sometimes explored by the bravest of Gorgeknot youths in hopes of proving or disproving the local myths about various ghosts and boogie-men, most residents of the slums avoid structures. Any of the locals who happen to notice the PCs approaching or walking around the mansion will give them disapproving looks.

Though all of the windows have been boarded up, the ruined manor is accessed easily enough via the front door, which just barely still hangs attached solely by an almost-rusted-through bottom hinge. The dilapidated grand hall is some 40’ wide, and 50’ deep, with doors to the left, right, and in the back directly across from the entrance. The chamber is open to the second floor, and large staircases ascend on each side of the room, though any attempt to climb to a higher floor (either from these stairs or elsewhere in the mansion) result in crumbling infrastructure and possibly even a bad fall.



Shortly after the PCs enter the house, the thugs sent by Norman Woodley rush in from the side doors and attack, one of them yelling, “*The Sect of Twilight sees all!*”

Sect of Twilight Thug

AC: 15 HD: 3 (d8) Size: M MV: 30’
Att: short sword Dmg: 1d6
Save: P Int: Avg AL: LE XP: 20+3
Hit Points: 17, 16, 12, 11, 11, 10, 8

One of the thugs has a note folded up in his pocket (Handout 1).



Any PC who is from Nefford will likely know, given their current location, that this refers to the McCoy Manor, another of the original homesteads of Gorgeknot. Otherwise, they can easily get this guidance from Father Ob. Norman, too, can also direct the PCs to the old McCoy mansion, if they happen to ask him for whatever reason. In this case, Norman will alert the Sect so they will be prepared for the PC’s invasion.

The McCoy Manor

Even more dilapidated than the Neuville location, the McCoy manor is now little more than a few barely-standing walls, and a lot of rubble. Conspicuously, in the center of the ruins, is a pile of rugs. Hidden below them is a trap door made of steel which opens to a 4’ diameter shaft which drops 30’ down to the sewers.

Even if the Sect of Twilight has been alerted to the potential of an assault by the PCs, the McCoy mansion and this entrance to the sewers will not be actively guarded by the cult, as not only would they rather fight the PCs in the safety of their underground lair, but they don’t want to draw any unnecessary attention to the place from others.

THE EVIL BELOW

The lair used by the Sect of Twilight under the town of Nefford is divided into two main sections. The first, and most easily accessible is known to the lower-ranked members of the cult as a shrine to the goddess Sra'ha. Further in is a larger complex, a temple to Orcus which is almost as old as the town of Nefford itself.

The sewer mains are roughly 10' wide, 7' tall, and are ovoid shaped. The effluent running through it is about 2' deep in the center of the tunnels where it's deepest.

For every 5 minutes spent in the sewage, PCs will need to make a CL 3 Constitution save with a failure resulting in mild gastrointestinal infection lasting 1d4+2 days and causing a -1 to the infected PC's Strength score until cured, whether naturally or through magic. If an infected PC spends enough time in the sewage to have to make a second check and fails that as well, the infection will become severe, increasing the penalties to -2 to Strength, -1 to Dexterity, and a -1 to Constitution; the duration by 1d4+1 weeks; and the PC will permanently lose 1d2 hit points from their hit point total for each week that passes while infected.

The temple's walls and ceilings are made of basalt, while the flagstones of the floor are made of red jasper streaked with black. Doors are made of 2" thick brass, and slowly swing shut by themselves over the course of a minute unless propped open. Rooms are not lit, unless noted in their description.

Random encounters happen on a 1 in 6, and should be checked for every 30 minutes of game time.

Sect of Twilight Thugs (1d4+3) are encountered in the Hidden Shrine of Sra'ha (Rooms 1-8), and Blades of Orcus (1d4+1) are encountered in the Lost Temple of Orcus (Rooms 9-32). The thugs are likely to run for help if they need it and have the chance, or try to surrender if they can't. The Blades of Orcus will fight to the death, however.

Sect of Twilight Thug

AC: 15 HD: 2 (d8) Size: M MV: 30'
Att: short sword Dmg: 1d6
Save: P Int: Avg AL: LE XP: 10+2

Blade of Orcus

AC: 17 HD: 3 (d10) Size: M MV: 30'
Att: long sword Dmg: 1d8
Special: resurrect (rise with 6hp one round after dying)
Save: P Int: Avg AL: LE XP: 40+3

THE HIDDEN SHRINE OF SRA'HA

This area of the complex is the only section most of the members of the Sect of Twilight are allowed to access, and in fact most don't even know that anything other than this area exists. This portion of the sect has been taught and believes that Sra'ha isn't a manifestation of Orcus like the Church teaches (and knows) but that she is just a goddess of death as her followers in the past believed.

1 – Entrance Effluvium

The trap door at the McCoy manor reveals iron rungs set down the side of a tunnel, which descend for 30' before opening into the sewer tunnel running southeast. There is 120' of sewer tunnel before the ledge of Room 2 can be reached, and the sludgy effluent will restrict movement to 1/2 its normal rate. Thus a PC with a 30' movement rate will only be able to move 10' per round, and traveling from the base of the rungs to Room 2 would take them 12 rounds (two minutes).

2 – Visitor's Vestibule

This room is open to the sewer tunnels, with the ledge of its floor being just a few inches above the sewage line of the pipes. Usually this entrance is unguarded, with lit torches in sconces on the northern and southern walls. Four Sect of Twilight Thugs will be stationed here if they are expecting the PCs, whom they will extinguish the torches when they see light or hear anyone coming down the sewers towards them.

AC: 15 HD: 2 (d8) Size: M MV: 30'
Att: short sword Dmg: 1d6
Save: P Int: Avg AL: LE XP: 10+2
Hit Points: 12, 8, 7, 4

The thugs will do their best to keep the PCs from getting on the ledge and out of the sewer tunnel; this may keep them in contact with the sewage long enough to have to make a Constitution save against getting infected.

3 – Nefarious Nave

Massive black tapestries with the symbol of Sra'ha emblazoned on their centers hang from all four walls of this chamber. Pews crafted of mahogany line the center of the chamber, facing a large altar hewn from black-speckled red granite.



Upon the altar are two large brass candle holders (100gp each) holding thick black candles, as well as a brass kris (50gp) caked in dried blood.

The cult generally only uses this chamber during rituals so it is normally unoccupied, but if they are expecting the PCs there will be a half dozen Sect of Twilight Thugs stationed here.

AC: 15 HD: 2 (d8) Size: M MV: 30'
Att: short sword Dmg: 1d6
Save: P Int: Avg AL: LE XP: 10+2
Hit Points: 13, 13, 12, 8, 6, 3