



EN5sider Presents ZEITGEIST:

The Dying Skyseer

Adventure Two, Part 2

A 5E-Compatible Adventure for 4th-Level Characters



Introduction

IN THE FIRST ZEITGEIST ADVENTURE, THE PCs thwarted a coup attempt and helped prevent a war, but did so by aiding their homeland's traditional enemy. Such are the duties required by agents of the Risuri Homeland Constabulary, for protecting the nation is often at odds with simple black-and-white concepts of friend and foe.

In *The Dying Skyseer*, as the party investigates a murder they will cross paths with enemies they can recruit as temporary allies, and work with supposed

friends who seek to mislead and betray them. This is a complex world, and it will take canny and dogged investigators to sift truth from amid layers of deception.

Of course, this is a heroic adventure game, and while different groups might turn the Grimdark dial up or down a few notches for their own campaigns, what players generally want is to find bad guys, take them down, and be rewarded for it. There are plenty of villains lurking under the smoggy skies of Flint, and it doesn't take a prophet to know the PCs are going to thwart their foul plans.

This adventure is broken into several parts: an introduction, a prologue, four possible investigation threads, a climax, and a conclusion. This first installment of *The Dying Skyseer* included the prologue and the first investigation thread. This installment includes the second and third investigation threads, and the final installment will be comprised of the fourth investigation thread, the climax, and the conclusion of this adventure.

FROM THE PEN OF
Ryan Nock

EVOCATIVE COVER ILLUSTRATION BY
ShenFei

STUNNING CARTOGRAPHIC DISPLAYS BY
Brian Patterson and Jonathan Roberts

MASTERFUL INTERIOR ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Brian Lindahl, Claudio Pozas, and ShenFei
Includes art in the public domain

WITH UNPARALLELED LAYOUT AND GRAPHIC DESIGN BY
Eric Life-Putnam

PLAYTESTED FOR MAXIMUM ENJOYMENT BY
Jason Boss, David Braught, Josh Brzinski, Ted Brzinski,
Sam Coman, Neil D'Cruze, Francis Dickinson,
Robert M. Everson, Michael Gallogly, Matthew J. Hanson,
Michael Hart, Michael Iachini, Tom Jones, Laura Kertz,
Gene McDonald, James Robert Parks IV, Cathy Perez, Romana
Perez, Hamid Raoof, Bryan Rennekamp, Tyrone Shekelberg,
Judson Stowe, and Eugene Zaretskiy



SEAMLESSLY UPDATED TO FIFTH EDITION BY
James J. Haeck

ABLY PRODUCED AND FACILITATED BY
Russell Morrissey

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OPEN GAME CONTENT

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Thread Two: Gale

THIS ACT DETAILS WHAT THE PCs CAN DISCOVER as they investigate Nilasa's lodgings at Heward Sechim's alkahest factory and her connection to the fey terrorist Gale.

Heward's Alkahest Factory

Social. Real-Time.

The party questions the owner of a factory where Nilasa lived and worked.

By searching Nilasa's body or investigating her associates, the party should learn about Sechim's Alkahest & Etchings, a factory in Parity Lake that produces powerful acid. (Alkahest is supposedly "universal solvent," but this is just an exaggeration.) After nearly landing in prison five years ago, Nilasa tried to reform and found work at the factory just as it was starting up. Ever since, she has been a sort of mascot for the workers; her sense of humor made it much easier to cope with the stress of constantly being in danger of getting dissolved.

Factory Details.

Sechim's Alkahest & Etchings employs a few hundred industrious folk who work in shifts throughout the day. Most of the employees live in tenements in Parity Lake; a few make a longer journey from slums in The Nettles. Like most buildings on its street, the factory is roughly 40 feet tall, on a lot 50 feet wide and 80 feet long, with street-side doors for workers on the front and a small pier facing the lake itself at the back. There are no windows below the third floor.

The mostly wide open factory floor is busy and crowded with workers and equipment. Raw materials enter from the pier, and different teams handle the purifying and refining procedures. Then specialists combine reagents to create acids and corrosive pastes of various strengths. A portion of the factory floor is separated from the rest by a low wall; this is Heward's personal laboratory. Twenty feet up, catwalks ring the walls and crisscross the factory, and chains and pulleys hang from the ceiling ten feet above the catwalks.

The second floor of Sechim's consists of a common lounge area, Heward's personal residence, storage rooms, and a room with a few cots for workers who are pulling double shifts and want a nap. (Few factories have such a luxury.)

Heward lives and works at the factory, so he should be there whenever the party comes by, either experimenting in his personal laboratory (he's trying to create a magic urn that will, without supervision, make acid from raw materials dumped into it), overseeing the factory floor from the catwalks, or taking his ease in his upstairs residence.

Heward Sechim. Using wealth he received from his prestigious sky-seer uncle Nevard, Heward Sechim spent the past two decades developing a reputation as a crafter of pure and potent acids, a critical component for devices that combine magic and technology. Five years ago he was challenged by his uncle to open a large factory that would treat its workers with respect; most such operations are wretched and dangerous.

One of his first hires was Nilasa, whose upbeat personality had a positive effect on the rest of the workers. Heward thinks of her as a daughter, and he's grown worried of her flirtations with terrorist activities. He lets her sleep in one of the top floor storage rooms of the factory.

Heward has to rein in his natural exuberance for experimentation in order to keep his promise to his uncle. His main business just mass produces liquid acids and corrosive glazes, and he keeps separate his arcanotechnical workroom separate from the main floor, to cut down on the chance of a kid getting incinerated in an incomplete enchanted forge. Indeed, he tends to only have

child workers handle cleaning and maintenance, and not work with actual acid. A few times each week, Heward takes the hardest workers out for drinks at the Thinking Man's Tavern, and he makes a point of keeping the windows open to let out noxious fumes. By Flint standards, the factory is an almost pleasant workplace.



The Neighborhood.

As the party arrives, it's obvious that something's different about Heward's factory. This whole section of lakeside factories all contribute to Risuri military and naval resources, but Nevard's factory is the only one where there are no protesters on the street.

The factory to the left of Sechim's, which uses various drills and bores to precisely machine cannons, guns, and steamworks, is surrounded by a small mob of women singing traditional Risuri folk songs. Thick metal chains are wrapped around the double doors leading into the bore factory, and the entrance is guarded by burly men that the party might recognize as off-duty police officers if they succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence check.

An identical scene fronts the factory to the right, which employs hundreds of people who manually sift firedust into different grades and package it into charges with bullets for firearms. Across the street, three smaller factories all have comparable crowds. The women are the wives, mothers, and daughters of factory workers, and their protest is the second stage of a months-long conflict with the factory owners.

Previously, small groups of dockers had been coming to argue for better working conditions for the workers. Momentum built, and there was talk of a workers' walk-out. The owners retaliated by locking their factories in the middle of a shift, and they refused to let



anyone leave unless they produced their quota, and even then only if a new worker came in to replace them. Also, they're not paying any workers until the protests end. Now the women are protesting to try to get their loved ones free. Similar protests dot the district, since many factory owners coordinated their actions.

Heward has a trio of guards in front of his business, but they're present to keep the adjacent factories from trying to sabotage the alkahest factory.

Breaking the Bad News.

When the party tells Heward about Nilasa's death, he grimaces, then nods and says his uncle warned him about this. He explains that his uncle, a skyseer, is getting on in years and doesn't have many visions anymore, but just a week ago he told him that "an adopted daughter will blindly ride the wind to her demise."

Heward says he knows Nilasa had been trying for years to befriend Gale and the fey terrorists. He blames himself, because she listened to him a bit too much when he would talk about how horribly other factory owners treated their workers. Heward just wanted to instill a sense of pride and allegiance in his people, but he thinks Nilasa wanted to punish harsher owners. He says he cared for her too much to try reporting her.

Nilasa's Room.

Heward will gladly let the PCs check out Nilasa's small room upstairs, but there's not much to find: just some clothes, incidental money, and a lesson book for her to learn elvish.

A Favor.

Heward makes a point to say that he understands both sides of the debate about Risur's tradition versus its future. He's been on both sides, gotten into his fair share of trouble both times. He's not the kind of person who can fight, because he doesn't think either side is wrong.

He asks the party if they can get in touch with his uncle Nevard. He says that Nevard has the respect of radicals like Gale, but that he's not violent, and could be able to arrange a peaceful meeting between Gale and the authorities. Heward hopes that could prevent any other misguided kids from getting themselves killed. Any PC with the Skyseer theme knows a great deal about Nevard's life and history, and any PC proficient in the Arcana or Nature skill at least recognizes his name as being some respected Skyseer.

He can give the party directions through the rough roads and trails in Cloudwood to the henge where Nevard and his followers live. He hopes the party hurries, though, because Nevard's an old man, and if he dies one of the best chances for reconciliation dies with him.

Other Concerns.

In the course of the discussion, Heward dolefully mentions that he's got an awful lot on his plate already. There are the protests on either side, the government pushing for him to lower his price so they can get the arcane etchings they need for the next ship like the *Coaltongue*, and then some strange men who he's afraid will damage his factory.

The men, who smelled odd, sort of like burnt engine grease, wanted to buy a few cases of alkahest, but insisted he not report the sale. Since he sells to the government and his product is hazardous, he has to account for all his materials; so he refused. The men got angry, made some heavy allusions to the fires that have been striking around the district, and then left, saying they'd be back. The second time, two different men came. Heward stalled, said he needed time to arrange something, then had the men followed. They went to a seedy part of the district, away from the lake and nearer to the Nettles, but that's as far as they could be tracked.

Unbeknownst to Heward, these were agents of crime boss Lorcan Kell, who is trying to discreetly assemble the many various components needed to construct the colossus in the Bleak Gate. Intensely strong acid is needed to etch runes into the adamantine skin of the titan, and since Heward isn't cooperating Lorcan is making plans to have the dragonborn arsonist brothers set fire to the factory so one of his affiliates can buy it cheaply.

Want to Buy Some Acid?

Heward is willing to sell many types of acid and alchemicals, and is willing to fill custom orders or offer some basic vials of acid as gifts if the party can get him some answers to what led Nilasa to be killed.

Fog of War

Action. Tactical.

En route to meet with skyseer Nevard, the party finds a carriage imperiled by Cloudwood brigands.

In the steep, tangled terrain of the Cloudwood only a few roads are well-maintained enough for carriages to travel, and most traffic is on foot or horseback. Four miles from Parity Lake, Nevard's henge lies near the end of one of the roads, as does a community of musicians who act as the main contact this region has with outsiders. Bands of brigands roam the forest, and they get their supplies from this outpost in exchange for providing protection.

As the PCs near Nevard's henge, they're nearly two thousand feet above sea level, and the humid, sweltering air is thick with low clouds and patchy fog. The road ascends on switchbacks toward a forested plateau, and when the PCs reach this area they hear the panicked neigh of a horse galloping toward them. The animal streaks past, an arrow in its shoulder and a snapped carriage harness trailing behind it. Then they hear a woman's cries and intermittent sounds of gunshots and arrows streaking through the air.

It takes a few rounds to get within view of the scuffle. A carriage leans precariously at the corner of a switchback, its wheels stuck in undergrowth. The door to the carriage hangs open and three men huddle near it, reloading pistols and looking around as if trying to spot their enemies. A fourth man, the driver, sits dead atop the carriage with an arrow in his chest. Just as the party arrives, an arrow streaks in from the south hill and hits one of the pistoleers, killing him, and the remaining two scramble to the opposite side of the carriage. The woman's screams continue from within the carriage, which seems to slowly be sliding toward a thirty-foot plunge.

At first glance, it appears that a group of travelers have been set upon by Cloudwood brigands. The situation's a bit more complex, though. The driver and the men defending the carriage are members of Lorcan Kell's thieves' guild. For the past several months the Family has been making inroads in the city by playing different criminal groups against each other; in this situation, the Family has convinced a gang of Kell's thieves that they deserve a cut of the banditry going on in the Cloudwood. The dispute got out of control, and members of Kell's gang decided to kidnap **Morena**, the lover of the brigands' leader, **Renard Woodsman**.

After the kidnapping, Renard scrambled his fastest men, headed off the carriage at these switchbacks, and managed to pin down the kidnappers. More of his men are on their way, and the brigands will assume the PCs, being outsiders, are hostile. Renard's attention is too closely focused on killing the kidnappers for him to realize at first that Morena's carriage is about to fall and kill her.

- 2 Kell-Guild pistoleers
- 4 Cloudwood brigands (see Tactics, below)
- 1 Cloudwood falconer
- Renard Woodsman

Kell-Guild Pistoleer

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 15 (3d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

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

Low-Quality Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20 ft./60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage

Cloudwood Brigand

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12 (leather)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage, or 6 (1d10 + 1) if used with both hands.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

Cloudwood Falconer

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Skills Medicine +4, Nature +3, Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Druidic

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. The falconer is a 3rd-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *produce flame*, *shillelagh*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *entangle*, *speak with animals*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (2 slots): *barkskin*

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit (+4 to hit with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage, or 9 (1d8 + 1d6 + 2) piercing damage against humanoids.

Renard Woodsman

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Nature +4, Perception +5, Stealth +6, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Aeriel Bracers. Woodsman wears *aeriel bracers*, granting him +2 to damage rolls with a longbow or shortbow (included). If he falls, the bracers cast *featherfall* on him, and he can glide 5 feet horizontally for every 10 feet he descends.

Keen Hearing and Sight. Woodsman has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Woodsman makes two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with both hands.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.



Tactics.

Renard and one Cloudwood brigand are perched on the south rise, content to wait for reinforcements to arrive. On the northeast rise a Cloudwood falconer has just used a *spell scroll of conjure animals* castings to summon a swarms of ruby-red blood-drinking hummingbirds, monsters from the Dreaming that are simultaneously beautiful, weird, and mean (use **swarm of bats** statistics). Another brigand guards the falconer's flank as he sends forth his minions to drive the kidnappers from cover.

The other two Cloudwood brigands are approaching from the north, and will reach the map on the start of the 3rd round. They move around the northwest rise, approaching the two surviving kidnappers. When the kidnappers spot the PCs, they call out for help, but stay in the cover of the wagon, only occasionally popping out to shoot at enemies. Morena is tightly tied up on the floor of the wagon, but she has managed to get her gag loose and cries out in fear.

Timeline.

At the start of the 2nd, 5th, and 8th round of combat the wagon slides 5 feet west. On the 8th turn this movement takes it over the edge, and it plummets 30 feet, dealing 10 (3d6) damage to anyone inside. This mortally wounds Morena, but magical healing or a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) Heal check can save her if

administered before she fails her third death saving throw.

As noted above, two of the four Cloudwood brigands reach the combat area at the start of the 3rd round. Unless interrupted, the pair proceed around the northwest rise with the intent of reaching the kidnappers on their turn in the 5th round.

Terrain.

The steep granite cliffs of this area have plenty of small trees growing out of them, a PC can climb the cliffs by making a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

The carriage is 10 feet by 10 feet in size, and it starts 5 feet from the edge of the 30-foot-high cliff at the corner of the switchback. It only falls off the cliff if all it is completely over the edge. A character can make a Strength check as an action to move it 5 feet. (DC 14) or tip it over (DC 16) or sabotage all four of its wheels (DC 18) so it stops rolling toward the edge.

At the start of the encounter, place three small cloud banks on the map. Each cloud bank is 25 feet in diameter. Creatures inside a cloud bank have concealment from adjacent enemies and total concealment from non-adjacent enemies. Each round the cloud banks drift 10 feet to the southeast. If one leaves the edge of the map, place a new one somewhere on the opposite side of the map. Perhaps use a token to mark the center of these clouds, and move them each round.





One Big Misunderstanding.

Only after the kidnappers are killed or subdued will Renard listen to the PCs. At that point, it might be possible with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get him to stop shooting and call off his men to talk. This becomes much easier (DC 12) if the PCs point out that there's a woman in the carriage in mortal peril and that they can help save her.

Aftermath.

Renard and his men are criminals – they've robbed dozens and killed more than a few in the past year – but they're not specifically hostile to the party. Indeed, killing them will earn the enmity of dozens of other brigands in these woods, and might sabotage efforts to speak with Nevard and Gale.

If the party saves Morena, Renard is willing to escort them to Nevard. If Morena dies, Renard's men have to hold him back from attacking whichever PC he thinks is most to blame. He orders them to leave the forest or suffer his ire, and then he recovers her body and departs. He can be convinced with a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to let the party through to talk to Nevard, and he'll automatically allow in a party with a Skyseer.

In either case, though, Renard wants to kill the kidnappers. He can be talked out of it by a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check, but convincing him not to becomes much harder (DC 20) if Morena is dead. If the party can't get him to back down, he'll fight them if necessary for the right to kill those who took his love. If the party fails to get his permission to continue on, they'll need to either make a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) or Wisdom (Survival) check or attract the attention of eight Cloudwood brigands.

Treasure.

If the party arrests Renard, they can recover his *aerid bracers*.

Nevard's Henge

Social. Real-Time.

The party seeks an elderly prophet's aid to arrange contact with the fey terrorist Gale.

Uphill from the nearest cluster of homes, a ring of stone plinths stand in a grassy clearing. Normally empty during the day, now a tent sits at the edge of the clearing, and a half dozen caretakers sit outside, waiting for their leader to pass.

Nevard's closest family and followers have brought the old man to live out his declining years near the henge where for most of his life he watched the stars every night. No single ailment is killing him; his heart is weak, his kidneys failing, his bones brittle, his blood thin. But he has more strength than he lets on, having foreseen he would need to test himself one last time before he dies.

Occasionally Nevard receives visitors who wish to pay their respects, and often his younger skyseer peers come to ask his advice for keeping their order alive. The summer nights are warm enough to sit out and stargaze, but the mountains here are low, and thick clouds, streaked with soot blown out from Flint's factories, obscure accurate views of the night sky. Still, each night Nevard invites his

Skyseer Nevard Sechim. For decades Nevard was one of the most prescient and respected skyseers in Risur. Then with the rise of industry and the fading power of the skyseer's visions, his star waned, and he withdrew into the Cloudwood east of Flint to focus on keeping his order alive. Now nearing one hundred and twenty years old, Nevard cannot see the path forward—for the world or for his order.

The old man walks feebly and leans on a plain staff which carries the banner of his family line. His deep voice warbles frailly, but somehow when he speaks

the wind hushes so everyone nearby can hear him. He possesses no overt magical power, certainly nothing of use in a fight, but the land and sky respect him and make his passage easy.

He has foreseen that he'll die within the year, but he is conserving his strength, hoping to make one last journey to the peak of Cauldron Hill before he dies.



guests to sit with him, hoping to see something of the future.

Nevard's tenders are wary of the PCs unless they come with Renard's recommendation, or include a character with the Skyseer theme. Otherwise they are stopped at the edge of the clearing. The party might persuade the guards that Nevard would want to see them with a DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check; alternately they might offer medical service with a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check, or show familiarity enough with skyseer traditions to earn entry with a DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check.

Failing that, Nevard himself is always interested in talking, and while his tenders try to keep visitors away, if the party makes a commotion Nevard will hear them and invite them into his tent.

A Dying Man's Wish.

Inside the tent, the light from smoldering incense sticks is dim, to spare the old man's eyes. A faint stench of withering cloys the air, not quite masked by fragrant scents of cinnamon and cloves.

Nevard knows that Gale has been causing mayhem in Flint. Indeed, she has come to him several times asking his guidance. She hasn't listened to him much, which makes him chuckle. But the last time she visited she said she had followed his advice and had found a mutual threat that even the people of Flint would take seriously.

Nevard might not agree with Gale's tactics, but he likes her because she's one of the few beautiful women who'll give an old man like him more than polite conversation, and she always is accompanied by the sweet music of birds. He hopes she'll be able to get people to listen to her warnings, and he would like if the party could help her, but he is wary of betraying her trust. He says he can easily arrange for Gale to meet with them – she owes him that much – but he'll only do it if the party can grant him his dying wish.

He wants to go to the peak of Cauldron Hill, the highest point in the city, with the clearest skies and the strongest font of magical power. There he thinks he might be able to pierce the strange veil that seems to have fallen over the vision of the skyseers. He wants to find a path that can let people like Gale and those pushing for industry walk together in harmony.



But Cauldron Hill is firstly restricted, and only Reed Macbannin, the mayor of the Nettles district and a mage skilled in defending against the dark arts, can grant anyone access. Secondly, the reason it's restricted is because it is probably the most dangerous and cursed place in the country, so even if Nevard can go there, he'll need protection.

Nevard wants the PCs to arrange for him and them to climb to the peak of Cauldron Hill and spend an evening. It's not unprecedented; Macbannin and some of his apprentices go there to keep eyes out for threats before they get out of hand, and occasionally the military trains elite warriors atop the mountain. With the right wards from Macbannin, it could even be safe.

The PCs can easily arrange an appointment to meet with Macbannin, if they're willing to help Nevard.

A Witch's Brew.

One of Nevard's allies – an orc shaman from Ber named **Pazamu** – possesses a scroll of a forbidden spell, *bond of forced faith*, originally used by the witches of Cauldron Hill to make themselves nigh invincible in battle. It binds the life forces of one or more people to the spell's target, so that one person can share the health and vigor of the others.

If the PCs approve, the day of the climb Pazamu will perform the ritual to cast the spell. Each willing PC sheds a drop of blood into a cup of milk, and Nevard drinks. Then, for the next 24 hours, Nevard will be able to climb and move with the health of a normal adult person, and damage that would be dealt to him is instead divided evenly (rounded down, minimum 1 apiece) among those bonded to him.

The ritual is written on a scroll of human flesh with invisible ink made from the blood of an infant sacrifice and the milk of its also-sacrificed mother. Neither Pazamu nor Nevard mention these unpleasant details, but a PC observing the ritual might recognize the abhorrent history of the magic with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check. The scroll is a centuries-old relic, and will be consumed with the casting; Nevard prefers it be used for good rather than the horrors it was originally intended for.

Refusal.

If the PCs decline, Nevard eventually manages to arrange for Gale and some of her allies to sneak him to the top of Cauldron Hill. He still uses the *bond of forced faith*, and without the PCs to draw Macbannin's attention, he is not set upon by Cillian Creed's sabotage. He schedules his rally to reveal his vision, as detailed in Thread Four: The Conspiracy (in the next part of this adventure).

Nestled Atop the Nettles

Social. Real-Time.

Nettles district mayor Reed Macbannin holds the key to fulfilling Nevard's wishes.

The one quality road in The Nettles curves around Cauldron Hill, heading up to the manor of Mayor Reed Macbannin, located a thousand feet up the twenty-three hundred foot high mountain. Here the gentle slope of the lower mountain turns to a steeper and rockier rise of stone, making Macbannin's rich manor the gatekeeper between the slum homes of thousands and the cursed mountaintop.

The compound's high iron fence surrounds a manor house, servant houses, a stable and a track for horses, a carriage house, a red-brick gardener's building, and overall beautiful landscaping with myriad flowers. Macbannin employs fifty regular staff, and all of them have received at least rudimentary training to understand the dangers of the eldritch magic further up the mountain.

While it's possible to bypass the manor and attempt a more perilous climb, stories of people coming back down changed and evil are enough to keep most fools from trying. Also, throughout the day Macbannin's guards patrol a ring around the mountain with hunting dogs to check for signs of people who have snuck through.

Secrets and Sorcery.

Any person who sits as mayor of The Nettles must have the approval of the previous mayor and the city governor. He is not elected to his position. A lattice of wards, assembled over centuries, protects the rest of the city from the dangers of old witchcraft, and whoever oversees these wards must be skilled in defensive magic and be trusted not to be corrupted by undead spirits of the witches who once ruled there.

Macbannin is not corrupted, simply deceived. He believes his actions are sanctioned by the king, and so he acts with patriotic zeal to protect the king's secrets. By the time the PCs come to him, he has already learned from Cillian Creed about the theft of documents from the Danoran consulate, and that the PCs are investigating the crime. Knowing their reputation after the events in *Adventure One, Island at the Axis of the World*, Macbannin can't take the chance that the PCs will simply fail to solve the mystery.

Macbannin sees their coming to his own doorstep as a great fortune. He sees a chance to kill the party without suspicion, thus ending the investigation. While he laments having to kill loyal subjects of the king, he believes he acts for the greater good.

The Courier.

When word of the consulate theft reached Governor Roland Stanfield, head of the Colossus Cell in Flint, he wasted no time contacting the leader of the Obscurati, Nicodemus the Gnostic. Governor Stanfield has used *needlewire*, a magic serum, to transfer Nicodemus's consciousness remotely into a middle-aged human vagrant. A quick shave and a bath later, Nicodemus assumed the role of a simple courier named **Doro**, ferrying messages between Reed Macbannin on Cauldron Hill and Leone Quital beneath Cauldron Hill in the Bleak Gate.



Nicodemus uses a secret system of arches along the Stanfield Canal to pass between the two worlds, and in the past few days he's gotten on top of the threat to their project's secrecy. Even Macbannin and Quital don't realize he's anything more than a trusted courier of Governor Stanfield, and indeed in a matter of hours Nicodemus plans to kill this body and return to the Obscurati palace on the island of Mutravir in Crisillyir.

When the PCs arrive to speak with Macbannin, Cillian Creed – in his role as the manor's butler – asks the party to take a seat in the garden in front of the house. A few minutes later Nicodemus finishes delivering a message to Macbannin about how Quital is sending over some of his soldiers to help recover the missing Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen. (If the Thread Three event “A Weight of Crumbling Stone” has already occurred, the meeting instead is to discuss whether to recruit the doctor or execute him.)

Creed goes to inform Macbannin of the party's arrival, and Nicodemus stops in the garden for a moment. He lights a cigarette – known as *leaf of Nicodemus* – and nods to the party. His gaze is drawn to the slums stretching out across the nearby hill-sides, and he shakes his head as he exhales a huff of smoke.

“Can you imagine what it's like to live down there?” he asks, almost rhetorically. “Chaos, that's what it is. The mayor,” he nods his head back toward the house, “he could come up with the most brilliant plan to help those people. He could get all the money in the city's coffers. He could do everything right, but he's just one man. Not a cog in a machine, but a pebble on a beach. Chaos.”

He takes another draw on the cigarette, then smiles. “It's beautiful, what people can create out of chaos. But I'd gladly give it up to stop their suffering.”

At that point a groom comes up, guiding Nicodemus's horse. If any PC makes an effort to engage him in a discussion of morals or ideology, the mastermind can spare a few minutes, long enough to finish his cigarette. Soon Cillian Creed comes to the garden to say the mayor is ready to meet them, and Nicodemus mounts up, lights another cigarette, and departs.

The Meeting.

Macbannin invites the party into his office, its rear window facing the higher slope of Cauldron Hill. As the party says their piece, the butler serves whatever the PCs desire from the mayor's supplies of tea, wine, coffee, and sweets. Macbannin listens to their request with a grim expression, ponders the possibilities, then grins and says that he'll be glad to help.

He speaks with a convincing enthusiasm about how he hopes Nevard is actually able to avert further attacks by Gale, and that he thinks it will help his district if people know that he helped make it happen. If any of the PCs seem particularly interested in the history of Cauldron Hill and in defense against dark magic, he intimates that after this is all over, he'd be interested in taking the PC under his wing to teach them more; he says he expects the PC will go far, and he wants to leave a good legacy through his students.

Unless the PCs go to extra lengths to observe Macbannin in other situations, they shouldn't get any hint that he's up to anything

Amulet Mechanics.

The amulets have no real mechanical effect, and they simply keep the PCs from being possessed by the barrage of supernatural energy on the mountaintop. They're no use against being charmed or the other attacks from the monsters that await them. Also, their enchantment only works in conjunction with the lattice of wards on the hill, and so they're useless elsewhere.

A PC that takes off the amulet at night atop the mountain is afflicted with the Curse of Cauldron Hill.

Curse of Cauldron Hill.

You must make a Wisdom saving throw every round you are on Cauldron Hill while not wearing an amulet. These effects are permanent until removed by a *remove curse* spell.

After the first failed save, you instinctively lash out against all creatures that move away from you, including your so-called “allies.” You must use your reaction to make an opportunity attack whenever a creature moves away from you, if possible.

After the second failed save, you gain darkvision out to 60 feet. You cannot rest during the day and any rest at night forces you to sleepwalk for 5 minutes, during which time you are controlled by a malevolent spirit. Any hostile action you take during this possession wakes you up; another creature can shake you awake as an action.

After three failed saves, in addition to the previous effect, if you try to rest at night, you become fully controlled by the malevolent spirit until sunrise. It begins to rampage, seeking to spill as much blood as possible, and you do not wake. However, it cannot move more than 5 miles from Cauldron Hill, and must return as quickly as possible if it is already farther away.

nefarious. He's quite experienced at telling just enough lies to keep up his façade, so seeing through it is wildly unlikely. If the party gets the impression that he's not being completely sincere, you can remind them that as a politician, he's surely just trying to find an angle that will benefit his public standing.

Defense Against the Dark Arts.

Macbannin is willing to permit the PCs to spend one night on the mountain, and he insists that they come through his manor on the way up and the way down. He recommends they ascend during the day and make camp at the peak before nightfall.

He will provide each PC with a slightly rusted iron amulet, which they must wear to protect from possession by evil spirits. (See the “Amulet Mechanics” sidebar.) He'll also give them four kegs of goat's blood, which they must use to paint a ring of red around wherever they make camp. Spirits are distracted by blood, and the color red in general. They will likely smell the party, but when they spot the blood they'll believe they've found the trail of a wounded animal, after which they'll mindlessly walk in circles since they'll never find the end of the ring.

It's not a *flawless* plan, to be sure. If the PCs don't stay out of sight, the denizens of the Hill will pay more heed to a moving creature than a trail of blood. Also, while a dim fire will be useful because of the supernatural chill on the mountaintop, he suggests the party surround the fire with stones to hide its light.



Seeking a Vision.

Skyseers normally watch the stars, then sleep so that the subtleties of what they saw will be translated into dream visions. Those of great skill such as Nevard can sometimes foretell the future while awake, just by tracking the interaction of the stars, planets, and other influences most people are blind to.

Any PC who is protecting Nevard through the *bond of forced faith* will also see glimpses of a vision later in the night.

The weather should be clear for the next few days, so they don't have to worry about rain washing the blood away, but they should be careful not to mess up the ring themselves.

These recommendations are all legitimately useful. Macbannin plans to arrange the party's deaths, but he doesn't want it to be obvious that he was tricking them if somehow they survive.

He adds that on the way down, the party should come back through his manor. He'll have a purification ritual prepared so he can clear away any dark energy that might be clinging to them. Macbannin plans this as a fallback way to kill the PCs, but events will conspire to keep him from following through on that plan.

Night on Bald Mountain

Puzzle. Montage.

The perils of Cauldron Hill will emerge at sundown, but will the party's words be sufficient?

When the PCs ascend Cauldron Hill with Nevard, Mayor Macbannin offers them amulets of protection and kegs of goat's blood, then sends them on their way. The RHC can provide climber's kits, and in general the ascent is not particularly challenging. After an hour or two of climbing, the PCs reach the summit, a mix of rocky patches and dense tree cover, with only scattered grasses and undergrowth.

The view is majestic, but from this height it's easy to see how thick the smog is over Parity Lake. A gray smear covers most of that district, while the upscale Central district on the other side of the Nettles is clearer and brighter. Nevard, though, looks upward. He smiles as a warm breeze blows his robes and beard, and he nods happily at the clear view of the sky.

The peak is long, narrow, and relatively flat, with a traversable slope to the east, but perilously steep drops of a thousand feet or more on the other three sides. If the PCs explore, in addition to scattered old bones of what look like human fingers, they can find a small black cauldron caught in a tangle of brush, down fifty feet on a rocky lip on the north face. It must have fallen a century ago, but it has resisted rust. The climb down is difficult without rope, requiring a successful DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check, and the cauldron weighs about 40 pounds, but it can be hoisted fairly easily.

Before Sunset.

The PCs should pick an area up to 50 feet in diameter to surround with their ring of blood. An ideal place is amid the toppled henges-tones of the western rise, now grown over with grass, which would let the party make a fire for warmth without revealing themselves.

It also provides an excellent view of the surrounding terrain, and has the least obstructed view of the sky, which Nevard appreciates.

There are several ways the party can better prepare for the trial ahead of them:

- **Camouflage.** The clever arrangement of stones, branches, and leaves can create a screen for the party to hide behind, granting advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks against monsters outside the ring.
- **Hear our Prayers.** Whoever puts out the blood might want to reinforce it with defensive spells and prayers, requiring a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, which can grant the same benefit as camouflage.
- **Traps.** A PC might try to set a few basic traps by making a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. Within reason, a PC probably doesn't have supplies for more than three or four traps unless they made a point of stocking up earlier. Each trap is one-use and is essentially a hunting trap (see "Equipment" in the *Player's Handbook*).
- **Magic.** Spells like *silence* can help the PCs remain stealthy, and later in the evening simple spells like *mage hand* or *prestidigitation* can help keep the ring of blood pristine, and *light* can distract monsters.
- **Fake Camp.** Alternately, the PCs could bring up a few live goats, stake them to the ground on the eastern rise, and lure off a few monsters with a free meal.

Nightfall.

The sun descends brilliantly, gleaming off the waters of Flint Harbor, though the light is dulled by a haze across the city. Buildings far below cast long shadows in the streets. The darkness grows, consumes the city, and for a moment the mountain top is the only thing still illuminated. Then the night claims it as well.

City lights smear out below the party, but overhead the stars are brilliant and clear. Nevard says that he must study the stars for as long as possible, and that in the morning he will sleep.

Within an hour the air drops from the warmth of a tropical summer to a soul-chilling winter freeze. The wind fluctuates wildly, sometimes eerily still, then bursting with gusts that shake every tree on the mountaintop. Moans slide across the peak like waves, and when the wailing wind quiets, the party can hear suddenly-dry leaves cracking underfoot, and erratic bursts of malevolent laughter further down the slope.

Characters with the Spirit Medium theme can hear voices all around, but the sound is muted as long as the character wears his amulet, like a party down the street. If anyone without the Spirit Medium theme takes off the amulet, that person hears the wild music of spirits wailing in chorus while horns and strings cross dissonantly. If a Spirit Medium takes off the amulet, that character is stunned for a round as the whole mountain screams insanely and imprints flashing images of bonfires and silhouettes of humans being sacrificed atop the mountain.

The PCs start to see shadows moving in the trees, creeping upward toward the peak. Wispy white spirits circle and swoop lazily to the silent music, and though they do not seem to see the PCs, slowly more and more float by them, as if attracted by a scent.



Then the actual monsters show up. First something that looks like a semi-transparent legless man, its head just a bare skull, crawls hand over hand toward the PCs' camp. It's hard to make out details in the dark, but it stops when it reaches the ring of blood, and then it turns to follow it. Eager, maddened chuckling comes from the thing, like it's excited about an imminent meal.

Then a crowd of 1-foot-tall goblin-like specters approach from the other direction, cavorting and jumping in wild circles like it's a celebration. They suddenly stop when they spot the ring of blood, and they too start to follow it, gibbering to each other in Abyssal. In the following minutes they're joined by horned vestiges of tiefling-like demons, a growling lion whose head is framed by a cluster of writhing snakes, bat-winged rats whose screeching rattles listeners' ears, and more – all of them barely visible, like they're pressing up against a veil trying to reach into this world.

None of them cross the ring, but within an hour the party is surrounded on all sides by crowds of monsters, all of them mindlessly tracing endless circles in search of something to devour.

Vigilance.

The party must overcome several threats to make it through the night. For each of these, describe the threat, then let the players describe how they address the threat. If they have a solid plan, they can avoid a skill check, but otherwise they must make checks to avoid negative consequences.

The first threat is the cold. Have each PC make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw (DC 5 if they have a proper fire). On a failure, a PC gains 1 level of exhaustion.

The next challenge is staying hidden. Have each PC make a DC 8 Dexterity (Stealth) check (with disadvantage if they have a fire). If any PC fails, one of the monsters perks its head up and looks into

the circle as if it can't quite see the party. Only if half the party or more fails will the monster decide to break off from chasing the ring of blood in order to enter the circle.

Third is the hours-long, mind-eroding cacophony of wails on the wind. Those who take no precautions are disturbed the sounds, but it's possible to mitigate the danger with rudimentary magic, requiring a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check, traditional chants requiring a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check, crafting earplugs (makes the PC deafened), or singing a more upbeat tune. Singing automatically helps the whole party, and the monsters are too obsessed with tracking the blood ring to tell a human song from an insane demon mountain song.

The Vision.

Occasionally unnatural drowsiness will slide across one PC, or another will hear eerie horns playing in the night, while a third PC spots an impossible oddity, like a mirror image of the party sitting on the opposite rise.

Then an apparition manifests in the center of the circle of blood: a velvet red curtain hovers in the air, looking completely solid, glowing as if hit by a spotlight that doesn't exist. The curtain sways, and there seem to be figures on the other side.

After a moment, or if anyone goes toward the curtain, Nilasa steps out before they can go in.

Nilasa puts a hushing finger to her lips, then points out into the night and says, "The man who killed me is coming. His face is scarred, so he hides behind many faces." Then she raises a featureless black mask to her face. When she puts it on she fades away, as does the curtain. The air is suddenly thick with the stench of burnt engine grease.





The following vision appears to everyone who bound their blood.

The stars overhead seem to streak in lines as time stretches out, and then to the north, down by Parity Lake, all those who bound their blood to Nevard see a building catch fire with dreamlike swiftiness. Suddenly they find themselves standing between two factories, watching two tongues of flame leap from one to the the next, like a pair of burning dragons. Screams erupt from the people trapped inside, the conflagration consumes the factories, and the charred buildings collapse to reveal tomorrow morning's sunrise. A blackened sign sits in the ash, saying "Sechim's Alkahest & Etchings."

Then the vision ends with a snap, and they're again standing on the black peak of Cauldron Hill. Nevard, still looking to the stars, gives a knowing hum. He points up at a red star.

"Jiese, the plane of fire, is brighter tonight than usual. Its light reflects off the lake. You saw it, didn't you?"

It's still unclear whether they're awake or dreaming when a man cries out for help from the dark beyond the ring. It sounds like he's been set upon by monsters, but Nevard shakes his head and warns the PCs not to step out of the ring. The screams last for hours.

A Ring of Blood

Action. Tactical.

A sinister figure sabotages the party's defenses and unleashes the spectral horrors of Cauldron Hill.

Slightly after midnight, during a lull in the mad dance of the spooks and monsters, any PC with a passive Perception of 15 or higher notices something moving through the crowd of monsters perhaps a hundred feet away, on the other rise. Somehow less feral and wild, more deliberate in its movements, one would almost think it's a man, but the monsters aren't accosting it. They lose sight of it a moment later, and a minute passes. If any PC is so bold to venture forth, they can possibly thwart a disaster about to happen.

Almost imperceptible above the cacophony of spirits, the party hears the crack of a metal rod against stone. A brilliant glow lights up the mountaintop, shedding bright light in a 100-foot radius. All the monsters surrounding the ring of blood turn to look. The light source is a sunrod, an alchemical creation that glows far brighter than a torch but only for a few minutes.

A humanoid figure holds the sunrod, its body inhumanly angular, its skin featureless and black like a silhouette. It sprints to the near edge of the other rise and then hurls the sunrod. The glowing beacon arcs and then hits right in the center of the PCs' camp. As one, the monsters surrounding the blood ring lock eyes on the party and attack.

The Shadow Man.

The hostile figure is Cillian Creed in his normal form, without his illusory disguise. Macbannin gave him several stronger wards than those the PCs have available, and having been infused with the

Where's the Arson?

The Arson & Alkahest encounter is detailed in Thread Four, in the next part of this adventure.

A Vision for Skyseers.

If a PC in your group has the Skyseer theme, they have the following vision the next time they sleep after Cauldron Hill.

You sit in a field of grass, the night sky overhead, the planets hanging huge and low. Breeze whips the grass across your skin, and a tiger stalks you, somewhere out in the dark.

A light flares overhead, an old blue star called Mishados, and it begins to drift downward. Not to the horizon, but toward the earth. Then other stars rattle, like grains of sand shaken loose from a wet glass, and their descent turns to a plummet, turns to a streaking rain of light. They fall in all directions, but you know where Mishados will fall, and you know you must catch it.

This foretells events that occur in Adventure Nine, *The Last Starry Sky*. If the PC is curious about Mishados and researches its history, he learns it is named after an incarnation of the dead goddess Srasama. Said to have been a healer, the blue-skinned dog-faced Mishados waits in the heavens for when she'll be called to restore Srasama to life.

essence of the Bleak Gate, he incurs no attacks from the shadow monsters on the hill.

He has three other sunrods, and will throw them at the party's camp to keep the PCs from simply throwing the light away before the monsters attack. He doesn't feel safe enough alone on the mountain to actually attack the PCs, and if the PCs hit him, especially with positive energy attacks, he'll flee into the darkness. His statistics are unimportant; there's no chance the PCs will fight him in this scene.

Shadow Mites.

The main threats are three powerful monsters, but the mountain is filled with countless other creatures. While you could unfairly slaughter your party here, our assumption is that most of the dangerous creatures are far enough away that they won't make it to the party during the course of the fight. Either during or after the fight, the PCs should throw the sunrod(s) elsewhere on the mountaintop, which creates enough of a disturbance that they can escape.

To keep up the tension, you should liberally scatter **Cauldron Hill spooks** across the mountaintop. These feeble minions act more like hazardous terrain than creatures. Start with twice as many as there are PCs in the party, but add two more every round the party's camp is brightly illuminated, creating a tension of whether to throw away the light, or to keep it so you can see what you're fighting. They move slowly, but in huge numbers they can't be ignored.

- 1 cackling crawler
- 1 vestige of death
- 1 serpent-maned lion
- 10 Cauldron Hill spooks
- Nevard Sechim, Dying Skyseer

**Cackling Crawler**

Medium undead, neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural)**Hit Points** 49 (9d8 + 9)**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks**Damage Vulnerabilities** bludgeoning**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, poisoned**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10**Languages** Abyssal**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

Legless Laughter. The crawler is always prone and cannot stand. Melee attacks against the crawler do not have advantage because of its erratic movement.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it is paralyzed for 1 minute. It can make another saving throw at the end of each of its turns. If the target fails its saving throw, the crawler can grapple a paralyzed target as a bonus action.

Dance of Death. The crawler can entrance opponents by swaying back and forth. All creatures within 30 feet who can see the crawler when it uses its dance of death must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature is poisoned for 1 minute. It can make another saving throw at the end of each of its turns.

Vestige of Death

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 + 10)**Speed** 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11**Languages** Abyssal**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

Call of the Reaper. Any creature that has lost over half their Strength score to attacks from the Reaper's Scythe attack becomes shadowy and translucent. A creature in this state ignores all damage resistances and immunities of incorporeal undead, but takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns. This state ends once the creature's Strength score increases to at least half its maximum.

ACTIONS

Reaper's Scythe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (3d6 + 3) necrotic damage, and the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d6. This cannot reduce the target's Strength below 1. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest.

**Serpent-Maned Lion**

Large undead, neutral

Armor Class 12**Hit Points** 26 (4d10 + 4)**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +6**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13**Languages** Abyssal**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

Keen Smell. The lion has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Pack Tactics. The lion has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the lion's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Pounce. If the lion moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the lion can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Running Leap. With a 10-foot running start, the lion can long jump up to 25 feet.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The lion makes two attacks: one bite or claw attack and one serpent attack.

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.

Serpent. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.



Cillian Creed. Creed served as an overseas operative of the RHC, but took an early retirement after suffering a disfiguring facial wound in the last war. A master of disguise and illusions, Creed chooses to wear his former face in most occasions, now more necessary than before due to a recent change in his "condition."

Willing to follow any orders to defend his homeland no matter how heinous, Creed was recruited by Reed Macbannin to help keep a weapons research program secret. One experiment in refining the essence of the Bleak Gate into an oil form went awry, and Creed was infused with shadow magic. Now he can shift into an incorporeal form of living darkness, or reach out and attack others through their shadows. Several layers of illusions and wards allow him to appear to be a normal human with his original, uninjured face.



Nevard Sechim, the Dying Skyseer

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 17 (5d8–5)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (–3)	6 (–2)	8 (–1)	13 (+1)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)

Skills Medicine +6, Nature +3, Perception +6

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Druidic, Elven

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Improved Skyseer. In his final days, Nevard Sechim is one of the most potent Skyseers in the world. Nevard is not limited to using his insightful touch ability once per combat. Instead, Nevard may use the insightful touch granted by his Skyseer feat (see the *ZEITGEIST Player's Guide*) an unlimited number of times per combat. Only one target may be affected by Nevard's touch at a time. This improved ability replaces Nevard's Wild Shape trait, as the old man has not been able to change his form in years.

Spellcasting. Nevard Sechim is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *guidance*, *produce flame*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *entangle*, *speak with animals*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin*, *pass without trace*

3rd level (2 slots): *daylight*, *conjure animals*

ACTIONS

Walking Stick. *Melee Weapon Attack:* –1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 1 (1d6–3) bludgeoning damage.



Cauldron Hill Spook

Tiny undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (–4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (–5)	7 (–2)	1 (–5)

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Spooky. Spectral goblins, swooping bats, tiny horned men, baying hounds, and disembodied heads scamper and dance in a slow, endless horde, ascending to the peak of Cauldron Hill. When one of these spooks spots a mortal creature it drags the poor soul into the throng of cavorting horrors.

ACTIONS

Pandaemonic Dance. Each enemy adjacent to the spook takes 1 damage. The spook treats any creature that is brightly illuminated as an enemy, even if it's another monster.

Tactics.

Nevard offers his skyseer guidance early and then just tries to stay out of harm's way.

The **cackling crawler** goes after someone who looks easy to grab, while the **serpent-maned lion** tries to get into the center of as many enemies as possible. The **vestige of death** tries to go after targets that aren't in melee. If the whole party is in melee, it strikes for Nevard, creating a second front. The spooks just swarm toward the sound of battle, or toward light.

The monsters are all designed to make standing still in the "safety" of the ring of blood actually be a bad idea, so Nevard might suggest that they move.

Terrain.

Whenever a PC becomes damaged, mark the square he was in. Those squares, as well as any square of the original ring of blood, counts as difficult terrain for the monsters, since they struggle to resist the temptation of food.

Aftermath.

Once the major monsters are defeated and the sunrod removed, there are no more attacks, though the PCs do get a feeling like something huge and invisible is standing over them, watching their every movement. Then a shooting star streaks across the sky, and the ominous sensation passes.

Nevard suggests, as casually as if he were recommending a coat for cold weather, that it might be a good time to leave. He believes he has seen enough, and he needs to rest to understand what it all means. Also, he asks the PCs pay heed to the vision of the fire dragon at the factory, and see if they can help his nephew Heward. With a bright light source like the sunrods drawing attention elsewhere, the hour climb back down is safe.



Down the Mountain

Social. Real-Time.

Bedlam grips the Macbannin manor as you make your way down the mountain.

The PCs might rush past this scene on their way to the arson at the alkahest factory. If so, make note of which PCs don't get Macbannin's purification ritual; Gale will detect the stench of the Bleak Gate on those characters.

Military Response.

Guards at the rear gate to the manor let the PCs in, but before they get far they're intercepted by Mayor Macbannin and a squad of heavily armed soldiers in green and black night operation uniforms. Led by one **Lieutenant Dale**, the soldiers were ordered up Cauldron Hill an hour ago when a sudden bright light appeared on the top of the mountain. The soldiers have swords drawn and defensive totems strapped to their shields, and they watch the party warily.

Macbannin tries to explain it all as a silly mix-up on his part. He didn't think to notify the military that people would be on the mountain, and he was as surprised as anyone when suddenly a bright light appeared. He asks the PCs to explain everything that happened, and – after checking the party's amulets and convincing Lieutenant Dale that the PCs aren't possessed – he asks them into his manor, where he can purify them of ill energy.

Originally Macbannin planned to have the PCs disarm and disarm, and then he would "purify" one PC at a time with a soporific poison. Once they were all asleep he'd take them down to his laboratory, slit their throats, and wait for a convenient time to dispose of the bodies. That plan isn't an option now, so to keep up appearances Macbannin performs a ritual – it takes just 10 minutes – to clear away energies of the Bleak Gate. If any PC did take off his amulet and mentions it, Macbannin can also cast a *remove curse* spell. Macbannin's too busy to do the normal full suite of precautionary divinations, so a PC who doesn't mention taking off his amulet can slip through and keep the curse active.

Reinforcements.

Lieutenant Dale and his squad are all dressed up with nowhere to go. If the party asks nicely, they can get Dale to send along one man with the PCs to check out the arson vision. If they're very convincing (Charisma (Persuasion) DC 20), all five of them will go along. Treat them as **allied soldiers** (see *Player's Guide, Part 2*).

If any PC has the Martial Scientist theme, they know of Dale and vice versa. He attended the Battalion academy, and his thesis was *Meditation, Coffee, and Cherry Pie: Unorthodox Salves Against the Supernatural*.

Fighting Gale?

If at any point she comes under attack, Gale leaps off the cliff and down the waterfall. After falling two hundred feet she soars away. She doesn't fight back.

Gale has a larger role and may engage in combat in Adventure Five, *Cauldron-Born*. Until then, treat her as able to overcome any saving throws and withstand any attacks until she escapes.

Hana "Gale" Soliogn. An eladrin woman just over 100 years old, Hana spent most of her life as the property of House Soliogn, a family of Danoran mine owners. Having always felt an affinity to the fey history of Risur, Hana fled Danor a year ago and found her way to Flint, where her innate magical powers awakened. Initially sheltered by druids in the Cloudwood, once she learned to control her gifts she turned them toward revenge upon the Danorans. Gale can fly at will, control winds, and speak with birds, but has no directly offensive magic, so her tactics have relied on stealth and mobility to disrupt industrial endeavors that have backing from Danorans.



Gale has a huge chip on her shoulder and is highly distrustful of strangers. She has increased her attacks lately, ever since the defeat of Duchess Ethelyn of Shale proved to her that Risur's rulers are just minions of Danor. With the aid of fey servants of the Unseen Court she can slip into the Dreaming when threatened, but so far the Unseen Court refuses to grant her an audience.

Audience with the Wind

Exposition. Real-Time.

Gale, leader of an organization of fey terrorists, agrees to meet with the party, and can offer critical clues to the real threat to the city.

Sometime during the day after Nevard and the party ascend Cauldron Hill, a sudden breeze gusts over them, and a yellow canary flies a circle around them. The breeze speaks with a woman's voice, elegant and tinged with a Danoran accent.

"Your character comes recommended by a dear friend of mine. At his suggestion, I would like to arrange a meeting so you and I may discuss a mutual enemy. Speak to the wind a time that is convenient for you, preferably within the next two days, and my canary will guide you when you are ready. The meeting will occur in my territory, because while I trust my dear friend, I confess I find him a poor judge of character. After all, he associates with me."

The wind lingers for a minute or two, then swirls away and flies off invisibly. The canary stays near the PCs, but isn't a nuisance, and can be stuck in a cage fairly easily. Keen arcane observation, requiring a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check can reveal that it is a magical effect, and that it's probably remembering what the party is doing, but it will have to return to Gale to deliver the information.

A Convenient Time.

An hour before the time the PCs stated, the canary starts singing and trying to get the party's attention to head out. It guides them to the Cloudwood, down wild trails and up lush hills, before finally stopping at the top of a three hundred-foot high waterfall with a clear view of the eastern horizon. Natives of Flint will recognize the cascade as the *Bridal Veil*, a romantic icon of folk poetry and the site of several famous weddings.



New Magic Item.

Messenger Wind

Wondrous item, rare

The wind orb can be carried, or it can be left to float at any location, fairly invisible except to those who know to look for it. Five small golden feathers are attuned to the orb, and any person who has a feather can call upon the wind's power as long as they are within thirty miles of the orb.

As a bonus action, you can call upon the wind of the orb. It flies 10 mph (100 feet per round) until it reaches you; it will deliver (at 10 mph) a message you give it to the bearer of any other feather. Each feather can be used once per day. If multiple creatures activate feathers, the first resolves before the second begins.

The river that feeds the waterfall rolls over a eighty-foot wide cliff, spreading the cascade into a thin sheet that at dawn can illuminate the whole valley with the sun's reflection. Wildflowers wreath the cliffs and dot the few boulders that hang near the falls' edge. Hummingbirds flit about, and they seem to pay close attention to the party's presence.

Gale emerges from the tree line on the opposite shore of the waterfall, and she holds out a hand. The canary that guided the party flies to her, and when it touches her hand it disappears. If the party hasn't made any hostile moves, Gale then steps off a high rock and glides a few feet above the surface of the water, stepping on three boulders over the 80-foot-wide river as easily as if hopping a narrow stream. She lands on the shore by the party, nods to them, and thanks them for coming.

Gale is wary but willing to risk talking. She assumes the party knows her politics, and she respects them enough not to try to persuade them unless they ask. Instead she devotes her attention to explaining a mutual threat she has discovered.

"I have a contact, a courier to the Unseen Court who lets me call him Ellik. He's an eerie creature, dwells in shadows, but is loyal to the court and has a fondness for this nation which treated his people well for so many years.

"Just over a month ago, when the last new moon was aligned with the planet Nem, Ellik arranged for me to walk with him into the Bleak Gate. I will spare you the details of that journey's emotional toll, but during the few hours that night when I could see into the dark side of the world, I discovered something.

"There is activity in that mirror image of Flint. Not much. I never saw anyone other than my guide. Most of the buildings are hollow, like abandoned shells of dead sea creatures. But there are no echoes, and no wind blows, so you can hear footsteps from miles away. And in the distant gloom I saw torches and lanterns, lights that the denizens of that world would never need. Their path ran along the canal, to the still analogue of Parity Lake, and then up toward the Nettles. I did not have the time to get close, but I heard churning there, and saw smoke and steam drifting into the starless sky.

"They are working, assembling something, hidden right where we can't see it, on the other side of our shadow. My Nilasa found a clue. I sent her on a mission, and she found the truth, and they killed her for it. I

am furious at her murderers, but Nevard has made me realize that this conflict is larger than my selfish desire for revenge.

"Unfortunately, I can't return to the Bleak Gate, nor show you what I saw. The same alignment with Nem will not repeat for decades, and I have not yet found another way into that world. But I do have proof of my own."

She produces a tiny vellum book from her belt and offers it.

"This is a copy of a ritual that will detect various energies, though you have to have been exposed to what you're seeking. Worthless to most people, but I have been to the Bleak Gate, and I believe that when you were with Nevard so did you, or at least you touched the veil.

"I've flown across this city, trying to find sources. In some place the stink of it bleeds through naturally, especially on Cauldron Hill, but I've followed trails. The night after Nilasa was murdered, I found a strong source at the consulate, and I tracked it across three districts before I lost it. And too often I've found it clinging to factories, or in the foyers of rich businessmen.

"There is a conspiracy afoot. The Danorans are involved, and industrialists in this city, and some third force in the Bleak Gate. They've already killed to protect their secrets. We need to find out what their goal is."

The party now has access to the spell *detect planar energy*. Originally printed in Part 1 of this adventure, it has been reprinted here for convenience.

What's Next?

Gale believes this conspiracy is a mutual enemy, and she wants to make an alliance with the party. If they can help her find out who killed Nilasa and why, she'll do her best to calm her people and stop the attacks on industrial targets. Eventually she hopes to be of service to the city, and perhaps earn an audience with Governor Stanfield to press for formal negotiations.

Gale knows that she likely won't be able to convince the nation to abandon technology altogether, but she wants to do anything she can to protect some people and places from its effects.

She wants to build trust, but she doesn't intend to meet face to face any time soon. To help the PCs in their investigation, and to let them share information with her, she gives them a *messenger wind* (see below). She keeps one feather for herself so she can call and receive messages.

In the meanwhile, she asks that the party look out for Nevard. He will be hosting his rally soon, and she worries that his revelations might threaten those who killed Nilasa.

Making Nice with Criminals.

If the PCs don't try to arrest Gale, when they file their report with the RHC, their boss Stover Delft is less than thrilled to hear about it. While he ultimately trusts his constables, that won't spare them from some exasperated shouting.

If they don't mention the meeting, eventually Delft will want to know what they've been up to. The next adventure involves an audit of their activities by the Constabulary, and it could be interesting to see how the party manages lying to their superiors and co-workers.



Vekesh Mission.

If any PC has the Vekeshi Mystic character theme, now is an opportunity to fulfill the mission (see the Introduction of this adventure in Part 1), though a wise would be discreet when delivering a gift to a so-called terrorist from a so-called murder cult.

Gale accepts the gift cautiously, and if she has a chance to speak with the PC she asks for more information. She wants to know if she's expected to be an assassin, or just to remove threats. So far she has tried not to kill people except in self-defense, and she won't promise to obey orders from a faceless court.

Give the PC a chance to sway Gale one way or the other. If the PC does nothing, at the end of the adventure news will break of Gale abducting wealthy industrialist Guy Goodson in the middle of his own wedding, carrying him off to the Cloudwood after sabotaging and sinking the steamship the man uses to get to and from his island villa.

If the PC's position is in favor of violence, instead the news mentions the abduction, and then Gale trapping Goodson inside his steamship before sinking it.

If the PC's position is against violence, the news is about how Gale snuck into the wedding as a guest, then after congratulating the couple and delivering a gift flew away, leading to speculation that Goodson is in cahoots with the terrorist.

New Spell.

Detect Planar Energy

The energy drifts to you like a fragrance on a breeze. You spin and locate the strongest source of the smell, then set out.

1st-level divination (ritual)

Casting Time 1 action

Range: 1 mile

Components: V,S

Duration: 1 hour

Choose a plane you have visited or have otherwise had contact with. For the spell's duration, you can sense the direction to and intensity of energies from that plane, to a maximum range of one mile. These energies tend to fade after a few hours or days, but it is possible to track creatures native to other planes by following the trails of planar energy they leave in their wake.

The spell can be foiled by strong sources of energy from the same or other planes. For instance, Cauldron Hill in Flint is a powerful beacon of shadow energy, so you would be unable to pinpoint any sort of foreign energy there, not even fey or elemental energy.



Thread Three: The Doctor

THIS ACT DETAILS WHAT THE PCs CAN DISCOVER as they track and investigate the foreign doctor, Wolfgang von Recklinghausen.

Person of Interest

Puzzle. Montage.

The party pursues a foreign fugitive through the chaotic streets of Flint.

The details of this scene vary depending on if the party sets out after Wolfgang immediately, or if they follow the lead later. In either case the doctor has a several-hour lead on the party, but whom the party comes across and what they know depends on the time.

There's not much of a ticking clock, and several paths can all eventually lead to their quarry, so give the party plenty of leeway on how they want to track Dr. von Recklinghausen.

Case File.

If the party acquired the doctor's case file from the Danoran consulate, they learn he was staying as a guest at a hostel called The House of Blue Birds in North Shore. His two references was a local surgeon named **Dr. Barnaby Camp**, and he listed as his secondary contact **Lynn Kindleton**, a professor of human biology at Pardwight University.

They can also have a record of his address in the Malice state of Arrovia, a brief bio that lists his educational background across three different countries and his practice as a surgeon.

House of Blue Birds.

The staff here recalls "the doctor with the foreign accent," and remember him rushing in, claiming he was coming back from a surgery, and asking for water and a towel to wipe blood from his hands. Then he hurried to his room and a few minutes later exited through a back door.

An hour afterward (and so possibly just a short while before the PCs show up), a man with a pencil thin mustache came to the hostel and asked about the doctor. He showed a police badge with the name **Officer Roger Porter**, so they let him into the doctor's room. After five minutes of flipping over mattresses and pulling any stray personal item into a small bag, the officer handed over a few gold coins as a bribe and left.

(The hostel staff do not mention the bribe unless the party presses them hard for information.)

One of the cleaning staff noticed Officer Porter wince in pain a few times, and thought she noticed a bandage and dressing on his chest. She didn't see any blood, but when he left his shirt did have an odd black stain there, and he smelled oddly like scorched engine

grease. The same cleaning woman took a blackened rag from the doctor's room after he left, before the officer showed up. Examination reveals small quantities of oil used to maintain a sword, plus a large amount of black fluid that possesses shadow energy. With a few hours and access to alchemical tools, it's possible to identify the black fluid as a strange mix of burnt oil and human blood.

This was actually **Cillian Creed**, magically disguised in the aftermath of his fight with the doctor, and the rag was from the doctor wiping his sword clean. Because Creed already cleaned out all of Wolfgang's personal possessions, there are no clues in his room. However, the hostel does still have the forms the doctor filled out when he arrived, and the letter of recommendation from Dr. Barnaby Camp, who vouched for the doctor to stay for a few weeks.

Rundown.

It's difficult but possible to track Wolfgang's movements from the hostel. By spending an hour checking the streets a PC can attempt to make a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to find people who recall seeing a man matching Wolfgang's description. If the party can succeed on this check three times (or if they call in a favor to get cops to help for a few hours), they can recreate his trail.

The doctor fled south route from North Shore to Parity Lake. He started to head toward Bosum Strand, then went deeper into the industrial district. The last anyone saw of him was in a very bad part of town, near the turf of local crime lord Lorcan Kell.

He Is Altering the Deal.

Wolfgang made contact with a representative of Kell's thieves' guild, and paid for bodyguards and a safe haven, with a promise to pay more if they could get him travel papers into Ber. By nightfall the doctor was holed up in an abandoned Clergy church in The Nettles.

The next few days Wolfgang writes letters to Dr. Camp and Professor Kindleton, trying to find other solutions to his problem. By the 5th of Summer he realizes that Kell's men are trying to extort him for more money, and are ready to sell him out if he can't pay extra for a Beran visa. On the 7th day Kell's people sell him out and Cillian Creed takes him into custody, unless the party intervenes.

Doctor Camp.

The party can find Dr. von Recklinghausen's sponsor, Dr. Barnaby Camp, either at his residence, or teaching at a surgical theater, both of which are in North Shore. Camp is a portly, curly-haired man who had Wolfgang as a student many years ago. They had kept in touch with occasional letters, and a few months ago Wolfgang referenced some marital troubles and a desire to travel alone to Ber, so Camp arranged for his residence in Flint.

Camp has already been contacted by Cillian Creed posing as "Officer Porter" by the time the PCs find him. Camp says he offered to let one of his students treat the man's injury for free, in exchange for letting the class watch, but the officer rudely refused.



Camp is a bit of a dead end until the 3rd of Summer, when he receives a new letter from the doctor, who is in hiding. The letter asks Camp to try to arrange safe passage out of the city for him, and alludes that he has made deals with criminals in order to avoid a monster that he thinks is chasing him. Wolfgang directs Camp to contact Lynn Kindleton at Pardwight University, who will know how to get in touch with him.

Camp normally would just want to stay out of trouble, but he was unsettled by “Officer Porter,” and so he hands the letter over to the PCs and asks them to take care of the problem.

Professor Kindleton.

The “campus” of Pardwight University weaves through many streets and occasionally shares buildings with other offices in Central District, and Professor Lynn Kindleton meets with students every morning in her office above a butcher shop, then teaches class in a hospital morgue a few streets over. Unlike Camp, Lynn is much more loyal to Wolfgang. They studied and worked together, and years ago he tried to get her to move to Arrovia with him.

Creed, in the guise of Officer Porter, visits Lynn the night of the 1st of Summer, right after she finishes her class. She claimed she knew nothing, but she’s a terrible, nervous liar, so Creed has her under surveillance. She receives her first letter from him the morning of the 2nd, delivered by a boy from the Nettles. Thereafter every day she leaves a letter at the downstairs butcher shop, and a messenger comes from the Nettles, delivers a letter from Wolfgang, then takes Lynn’s letter and a supply of meat and other foods back to the doctor. The messages do not go directly, though, and instead transit through Lorcan Kell’s men, who read and reseal them.

On the 6th of Summer, a letter comes asking Lynn to help Wolfgang flee, since he no longer trusts his bodyguards. On the 7th, she is captured with him unless the PCs intervene.

In the meanwhile, Lynn will lie and claim she hasn’t heard from Wolfgang since before he went missing. She’s already been visited by another officer, and Wolfgang warned her that he’s being followed, so she won’t trust the PCs unless they prove to her that they’re legitimate. Even then, she’ll want to arrange a private meeting with Wolfgang (the party could follow her). When she tries to go to The Nettles, though, her guide takes her to Parity Lake, where Kell takes her captive as additional leverage over the doctor.

The Hard Way.

By spending eight hours scouring The Nettles, hiking up and down hills and through narrow streets filled with petty thieves and swarms of beggars, a PC can make a DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check. A failure yields only rumors about another group of people also looking for the doctor, which has the locals on edge and nervous about talking. A success produces a few leads of spots where criminals might be hiding out, based on where messengers are going in and out of the district.

It then takes another eight hours and a successful DC 18 check to find a group of burglars who have heard about Kell’s thieves protecting a foreign on the run from the Danorans. They can point to the right hill, but it takes another eight hours and another DC 18 check to find the actual church where he’s hiding.

How Does the Plot Work?

Reed Macbannin used his knowledge of the paths to the Bleak Gate to craft a series of partial portals under the bridges of the Stanfield Canal, which runs from Bosum Strand to Parity Lake. Subtly embedded in the steel beneath the bridges are rusted iron bars etched with spells.

Whenever an object passes under these bridges, if it has the proper sigil stenciled on it, the magic pulls the object closer to the Bleak Gate. There are six of these bridges, and after passing beneath the sixth bridge, the item vanishes and plunges into the water in the Bleak Gate analogue of the canal. If it doesn’t go through all six within an hour, the magic fades and soon it’s impossible to notice anything amiss.

Cillian Creed delivers lists of items needed to Kell, who has his people either directly steal it and pack in crates, or arranges to trade it for protection. The crates are then stenciled and sent down the canal. None of Kell’s people ever travel with the crates, so they assume someone else picks them up at the other end, which is close to true. When the crates splash down in the Bleak Gate, Leone Quital’s people recover them and take them to Cauldron Hill. In the real world, people just assume some items were stolen in transit.

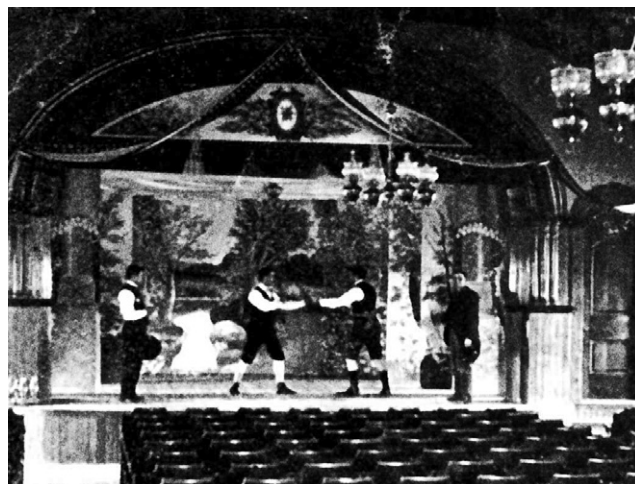
Theater of Scoundrels

Social. Real-Time.

A powerful crime boss, Lorcan Kell, might provide the party with the doctor’s location, but only if they can entertain him.

Most likely the party will have to go through Lorcan Kell to track down Wolfgang. Cillian Creed already has a long-standing relationship with Kell, because Kell’s men handle the smuggling of industrial goods. Kell knows Creed is looking for Wolfgang, but in his opinion the existing business arrangement doesn’t include sharing all his secrets. When he gets word the PCs are asking questions too, he decides to solve both problems at once.

Kell’s goal is to bring the PCs to him, have a little cruel fun at their expense, then have them do him a favor in exchange for the location of the doctor. Then when they’re on the way, Kell will notify Creed so he can catch the PCs in an enclosed environment.





Lorcan Kell. Now in his fifties, the grizzled Kell grew up an enforcer for local gangs, then eventually murdered his way into a position of leadership. He does, however, possess a great knack for instilling loyalty in intelligent minions who can run operations for him. Now he feigns gentility, dressing in elegant clothing that conceals no fewer than eight blades at any time.

Kell is unpredictable and hot-headed, confident he can kill anyone who's a threat, and when people try to stand up against him he takes it as an opportunity for entertainment. For him, nothing's better for him than taking self-righteous do-gooders down a few pegs by showing off his power.

His seat of power is a theater in Parity Lake where scum is welcome and decent people are turned away. Kell's guild of thieves practice their lies and legerdemain in the form of stage plays, often improvisational and with life-or-death stakes. Actors practice disguises and assuming unique personas, all the sorts of subtle techniques Kell personally never bothered with. He enjoys the shows, but his favorite game is to drag in a pair of random townspeople, and give one of them the choice of who of the two will receive a beating.

Kell is aware of the encroaching Family presence in his city, but he expects his "intelligent minions" to come up with a plan against them, not realizing that most of those minions are being wooed by Morgan Cippiano.



The Lure.

Starting the afternoon of the 2nd, one of Kell's agents watches the RHC headquarters, and when he sees one of the PCs coming or going he approaches and says that Lorcan Kell knows where the doctor they're looking for is, and that he invites them to negotiate at a neutral location: Lammers Theater in Parity Lake. Kell will be there tonight, and the curtain goes up at 8:00 PM.

Constables that succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence (History) check recall rumors that Kell runs his guild out of a theater, which means it's probably anything but neutral territory. But Kell won't budge, and unless the party comes to him, he doesn't care to talk to them.

If the party asks around and does some research, they can hear tales of Kell's operations, and how he likes to treat outsiders. A group that brings a gift to the crime boss gets a much more pleasant reception. But if the party just breezes in expecting to be in charge, Kell will make their visit painful.

The Bait.

Kell's center of power is in eastern Parity Lake, where some slightly better-off factory workers live, paying protection money to Kell's thieves' guild. It's a seedy neighborhood; if the PCs come here, it's obvious they're being watched. Their guide leads them to the heart of the area, which PCs with the right background might recognize.

Then just before they turn onto a new street they hear angry threats, a man's grunt of pain, and a woman scream. A hundred feet down the side road sits a stopped carriage, its driver reeling on the ground from an apparent blow to the head, its single horse nervous. A woman kneels over the driver, screaming "Someone stop them!" and pointing down the street. Two thugs wearing bright red scarves look over their shoulder as they sprint away.

Everyone in this staged scene, as well as most of the onlookers on the street, are Kell's people. The plan is that the PCs give chase to the thieves, who run down a street and then duck into an alley at just the right pace to keep the PCs able to follow. Then in the alley they open a door into the back stage of Kell's Theater of Scoundrels, luring the PCs onto the stage, where the curtain will come up, revealing an audience all leveling guns and crossbows at them while Kell applauds from a high box seat.

If the PCs seem hesitant, the woman improvises and adds, "They kidnapped my baby! Stop them!" If that doesn't work, she tries running after the men herself, hoping the PCs follow. There's enough amiss about the scene – the perfect timing, how unsurprised some of the people peering out street windows appear, how the bright scarves make it easy to follow the thieves – that PCs can reasonably see through the trap.

In that case, the thief-actors fess up, and a moment later one of Kell's lieutenants – an athlete named **Rufus Hammerton** who bounces a leather football on the ground as he talks – invites the party to join his boss inside the theater to talk business while taking in a show. To emphasize the "politeness" of the request, a dozen men come out of the buildings and form a loose wall behind the party.

By the time the PCs have gotten into this neighborhood they're horribly outnumbered, so any attempt at starting a fight would quickly result in an overwhelming force of thieves and scum surrounding them. If they insist on fighting, they'll end up overwhelmed, beaten to within an inch of their lives, then dumped naked in the lake near a sewer drain. Rufus insists that talking to his boss is much less pleasant than declining his invitation.

Star Attraction.

Kell invites the party to his box, and though he is supremely confident they won't try to touch him, his guards do search the party and take away any obvious weapons before the meeting. They'll be returned when the party leaves.

He tells his people to "put on a comedy," then eats a sandwich without offering any food to the party. There aren't even chairs in the box for them to sit down.

Kell says that he knows they're looking for "that northerner doctor," and that his men are sitting on the man, waiting for a way to make a profit on him. He's willing to have his men take them to Wolfgang. In return, he wants them to stop a smuggling deal he's gotten wind of. He hears it's going down the evening of the 4th, bringing in magic weapons that will be bought by some of his competitors. Kell is content if the constables just do their job and arrest the smugglers, since it will harm one of his rivals. But he suggests it might be more worth their while to deliver whatever is being brought in to him.

Should the PCs decline, Kell insists they stay for the show and make a counter proposal.

When the "comedy" Kell requested starts, a drunk and confused docker is pushed out on stage, and a scandalously dressed seductress flirts with him and makes a show of picking his pocket while he's distracted by her advances. Then another thief pretending to be a jealous boyfriend makes an appearance, and after chasing the



docker with various humorous objects – eliciting guffaws from the crowd – the seductress and her “boyfriend” take turns beating him.

Kell considers the PCs reactions, and says he’ll let the man go if they agree to his offer. If the PCs still refuse, be as vicious and cruel as you think your players are comfortable with. Lorcan Kell will get his come-uppance later, but for now he’s in a position of power that he loves to abuse.

Aftermath.

If the party agrees, he tells them that once some of his cop friends let him know the smuggling operation is thwarted, he’ll send a guide to take them to Wolfgang.

If the party declines, or avoids this encounter, they have other ways to find Wolfgang, but he’ll be better defended.

If the party attacks Kell, his stats appear in Adventure Five. In the very likely event the party loses that fight, Kell kills most of them, but leaves the person who first attacked him alive. He’ll disfigure that person and keep him chained up long enough to parade all his friends and loved ones through the theater and kill them.

Old Faith

Action/Social. Tactical.

The doctor has turned an abandoned church’s catacombs into a trap-filled lair.

Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen has taken refuge within an abandoned Clergy church built into a rocky cliff face in The Nettles. The church’s keepers left decades ago when the swell of poor factory workers moved in; their adherence to the Old Faith overwhelmed the Clericists who had lived on this hill.

Using scrounged items and some tools from his surgical kit he has assembled traps to defend himself, though if the party has made a deal with Lorcan Kell, the doctor’s bodyguards will disable the traps before the party arrives.

Hallowed Halls.

Within the church, creatures that are dying but not dead, immediately stabilize. Creatures can still die from hit point loss, but a latent blessing protects the mortally wounded.

Layout.

Unless noted, rooms inside the church are in total darkness.

1. Plateau Façade

The front of the church shows years of neglect, and you could walk by without noticing the place through the tangle of brush, vines, and tumbled stones. Out of some sense of respect, the locals have given the church some space. The nearest homes are a hundred feet from the entrance, though if you ascend a cliffside staircase, the next tier of the hill is clustered with slum housing.

2. Latrine Cliff

Effluent once flowed from the church’s latrine to this concealed cliff. The passage into the back of the privy is a tight squeeze, but disuse has left the place relatively clean.

3. Chapel

Broken and tattered pews lie around this room. The 20-foot-high arched ceiling once reverberated the sound of singers, but now just echoes eerily. Whisper holes to the Song Galleys along the sides of the room let people hear activity through the walls.

The doorway to area 5 no longer has a door, and the hallway is cluttered with debris. When the party arrives, six slum-dwellers sit in the tunnel, paid by Kell’s men to discourage curious visitors.

If the party arrives early in the week, a woman is waiting outside with her husband, who is holding his severed thumb in a bloody cloth. The man lost his thumb earlier in the day in an industrial accident, and the woman has heard there’s a doctor here, so she’s trying to get the slum-dwellers to let her in so she can have the doctor to reattach the thumb. This is well within Wolfgang’s talents, but his bodyguards are keeping him from helping hard luck cases to keep news of him from spreading.

If the party comes closer to the end of the week, there’s actually a line outside of people with sick children or injured family members, shouting for the doctor to come out and help them. All the people, including the slum-dweller look-outs, scatter quickly at the first sign that a fight might be coming.

4. Song Galleys

Monks would once stand in these two hallways and sing during services.

5. Common Area

Once the center of activity for the church’s monks, this room was shaken in the recent tremors, creating a broad flooded sump. Of the four pillars that held up the roof, one crumbled and one toppled.

Wolfgang hid the documents he took from Nilasa in this room. Above the crumbled pillar there’s a hollow in the ceiling. Wolfgang placed the documents in his water-resistant surgeon’s bag, then tucked it in that hollow. His bodyguards on loan from Lorcan Kell didn’t see him hide the bag, and aren’t aware of where the documents are.

Alarm: An alarm trap, marked **A** on the map, triggers if anyone enters this area. A trip wire, requiring a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot, yanks a weight that rings a cluster of small bells, alerting everyone in the church to intruders.

Traps: Additionally, two blade traps, marked **T** on the map, protect the approach to Wolfgang’s hiding spot. Anyone who steps in the trapped squares is attacked.



Nettles Church



Trap: Bonesaw Blade

Mechanical trap

Challenge ½ (100 XP)

Trap: When activated (see above), the trap makes a melee weapon attack (+10 to hit) against all targets in a 10-foot line. On a hit, the creature takes 5 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage. A creature can notice this trap with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, and the trap can be disarmed with a successful DC 18 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools.

Gates: Spaces marked G on the map have iron gates that hang from the ceiling, hinged so that when released they swing down. They are easy to spot, and aren't hard to disable, requiring only a successful DC 12 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools. Levers, marked L on the map, can be pulled as a move action to trigger the nearby gate. Any creature in the gate square is attacked with a +10 bonus to hit. A hit deals 1d6 bludgeoning damage and pushes the creature 5 feet in the direction away from the associated lever.

Thereafter, the heavy gate blocks its square, though it can be lifted with a DC 15 Strength check. A creature holding up a gate clears the square, but all attacks against it have advantage.

Secret Doors: Two secret doors lead to Area 4. A creature that searches the room and makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers them.

6. Sleeping Quarters

Only scattered bits of furniture remain from what was once the monks' sleeping quarters.

7. Privy

A wooden seat over a bucket was the best available in The Nettles, which has no plumbing. The door leading to Area 2 is hidden behind a tattered old curtain displaying a pleasant pastoral scene, and requires a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice. Wolfgang and his bodyguards still haven't noticed it.

8. Cloister

This small room was used for private prayers. Rows of bookshelves line the walls, empty from old looting.

9. Storage

A recently erected curtain blocks out light so the fire in Area 10 isn't visible in Area 5. Kell's men brought a few bags of supplies with them, and regular deliveries provide food and lantern oil.

A small well in one corner of the room is fed by rainwater. If the stones behind the well were knocked loose, it is possible to climb the chimney up 30 feet to the next tier of the hill with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

10. Kitchen

Wolfgang and his bodyguards usually stay here, relying on either the fireplace or a lantern for bright light. As in area 9, a curtain blocks light, and a secret chimney behind the fireplace leads up and out.

Fighting Wolfgang.

Kell can arrange for Wolfgang's bodyguards to disable the traps, then leave and let the PCs in to take the doctor, who doesn't resist if he sees how outnumbered he is. Alternately, very persuasive PCs might get Professor Kindleton to convince Wolfgang to meet and talk. If the party just comes unannounced, though, Wolfgang and his guards put up a fight.

- Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen
- 3 Kell-Guild thugs
- 2 bonesaw blade traps (page 22)

Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 13 (leather)

Hit Points 45 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Skills Arcana +5, Medicine +9, Nature +5

Damage Resistances poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Abyssal, Common, Dwarven, Primordial

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Experimental Surgeon. If Wolfgang treats a creature's wounds during a short or long rest, the creature's first hit die restores an additional 5 hit points. Additionally, he can reattach limbs that have been severed no more than 24 hours ago.

Alchemical Spellcasting. Wolfgang can cast the following spells. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence:

At will: *disguise self*, *expeditious retreat*, *true strike*
3/day: *shield*

Canary in a Coal Mine (1/Day). Wolfgang possesses a *canary in a coal mine* (see below), allowing him to cast *fly* on himself as a bonus action, with a duration of 1 round.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Wolfgang makes two malice-wrought rapier attacks.

Malice-Wrought Rapier. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage. If he scores a critical hit against an Unnatural creature (creatures with the aberration, celestial, fiend, or undead type), the creature cannot see him, as though he were under the effects of an invisibility spell, until he attacks again or 10 minutes pass.

Bomb (3/Day). Wolfgang chooses a point within 30 feet. All creatures within a 15-foot radius of that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 10 (2d6 + 3) fire damage.

New Magic Items.

Canary in a Coal Mine

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

From a gold chain dangles a tiny pendant in the shape of a canary, but it turns black as coal in the presence of danger. If you are surprised, attacks against you during the first round of combat are made with disadvantage.

As a bonus action, you can cast *fly* on yourself with a duration of 1 round. Once used, you cannot cast it in this way again until next dawn.

Malice-Wrought Weapon

Weapon, rare

Though deadly-sharp, this weapon has no adornments, radiates no magic, and its steel is tarnished and lifeless. A Malice-Wrought Weapon does not radiate magic and the enhancement bonus associated with it does not fade in anti-magic zones or specialized areas of null-magic, such as Danor.

If you score a critical hit against an Unnatural creature (creatures with the aberration, celestial, fiend, or undead type), the creature cannot see you, as though they were under the affects of an *invisibility* spell, until you attack again or 10 minutes pass.

Kell-Guild Thug

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 55 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elven

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Pack Tactics. The Kell-Guild thug has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Kell-Guild thug makes two melee attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.

Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

Tactics.

If the alarm triggers, one thug grabs a burning brand from the fireplace to use as a torch, then runs from area 10 to area 6. He splashes through the water to avoid the bonesaw trap, which produces enough noise to hopefully draw attention after him. He plans to wait by the lever in area 6, and drop the gate to stymie pursuit. If he thinks people are focused on him, he'll run for the exit. Otherwise he'll come back and aid Wolfgang and the other thugs.



What's in the Documents?

First, there are numerous reports and notes written by Security Chief Julian LeBrix, which reference financial irregularities of Danoran-owned factories. He posits that there's a campaign of smuggling that explicitly targets Danoran enterprises, though the huge number of reports—covering hundreds of witnesses from dozens of factories—makes it hard to synthesize an accurate narrative from all the data.

If the party get their hands on the documents, with a cursory read-through it's possible to determine that all the smuggled items might be going to a single construction project, probably something like a large warship.

If they manage to hold onto the documents, with a few days of work and the aid of some RHC staff with more financial know-how, they can determine that many of the factories that have lost items to this smuggling operation were recently acquired by a variety of buyers. The buyers have no history of entrepreneurship, but a few actually have criminal records. If the party looks into their finances, they see that they were all paid shortly before they purchased the factories.

Should the party put the right effort in, this can be one way for them to discover that Reed Macbannin is behind the whole operation. By cross-checking different accounts and perhaps bribing some bank officials to share their books, they can find proof that the payments to acquire the factories were funded by Macbannin.

Second, there is a detailed report of LeBrix visiting factories and discovering flasks of strange black oil with floating motes of white light in them. It was soon after finding these that his investigation was shut down.

When telling his story, Wolfgang says that he recognizes the substance. It is called witchoil, and a substance produced when the energy of the Bleak Gate that bleeds into this world. It's rare to find even a few ounces, and he can't imagine where someone would have gotten the pints LeBrix discovered. The oil, if burned, can stand in for costly spell components, but no moral man would use it, since it consumes souls that were awaiting their final rest.

If asked how he knows about it, Wolfgang looks a bit haunted and says that in his homeland, magic normally cannot be used, but witchoil is a reliable power source, so power-hungry men find it easy to overcome their qualms.

Wolfgang as an Ally?

After the last encounter, Wolfgang should be revived with some hit points. He'll fight alongside the party as long as possible, but he's Creed's first target. If the party bargained with Lorcan Kell to get Wolfgang without a fight, he'll be at full health, and a much stronger ally.

Meanwhile, the other two thugs wait by the curtains in areas 9 and 10, each with torches of their own. Wolfgang hides in area 10, ready to move if his guards say there's a clear path. If a fight breaks out, the thugs fall back into area 10, hoping to draw the PCs into a spot where Wolfgang can surprise them and aid the guards in flanking their opponents.

Wolfgang won't believe PCs who claim to be law enforcement, so he fights until knocked out. The doctor does not believe in wasting his bombs and prefers to fight opponents with his rapier whenever possible. If reduced below 7 hp, Wolfgang becomes desperate and uses his *canary in a coal mine* necklace to re-position himself to throw bombs in a final desperate act of survival.

Aftermath.

A combat encounter immediately follows this scene, but the enemies won't attack until the party tries to leave. The easiest way to keep the party from leaving right away, before they get a chance to heal, is to knock out at least one PC. That forces a short rest to get everyone on their feet, so when the party leaves they'll be ready for another combat.

Failing that, you might have Wolfgang say that the documents he was given are hidden nearby, and that they shouldn't leave without them, but that he won't reveal where they're hidden until he knows he can trust them. Don't try to make the stalling too obvious, lest the players feel rail-roaded.

The PCs must work to earn Wolfgang's trust. Initially, rather than handing over the documents he'll tell his story from his perspective, then explain what he found in them, trying to suss out from the party's reactions whether they're sympathetic or hostile.

Treasure.

Wolfgang wields a *malice-wrought rapier* and wears Nilasa's *canary in a coal mine*. The PCs can recover these items if they defeat him, and if he is taken captive in the Hiding in Plain Sight encounter, Wolfgang drops his sword. If the party hands him over to Leone in the A Weight of Crumbling Stone encounter, Wolfgang gives the party these items before leaving.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Action. Tactical.

Lurking enemies emerge from the shadows of the Bleak Gate to ambush the party, retrieve the documents, and abduct the doctor.

The steelshaper Leone Quital has brought allies from the Bleak Gate to help Cillian Creed recover Wolfgang and the documents. They wait nearby in a trio of carriages pulled by wraith horses, partially in the Bleak Gate and invisible to normal eyes. After the PCs enter the church they set their trap in motion.



Leone uses his steelshaping powers to embed a dozen steel bars (which he brought on the carriages) into the church's outer doorway. They can be pried free, requiring a successful DC 16 Strength check each, but at least three must be removed before it's possible for a Small creature to squeeze out, or at least six for a Medium creature to squeeze through. Of course, Leone and his allies won't stand by and let the party free themselves without a fight.

Creed and a small strike force all wear temporary magical amulets that let them phase through the bars. Creed has a spare amulet that he intends to put on Wolfgang so they can abduct him.

The strike force enters the church and waits in area 3. Creed eavesdrops, wanting to get as much information as possible from Wolfgang before striking. When it sounds like the party is about to leave, Creed and his squad sneak in. They disable the alarm and other traps in their way, if they are still active, and get as close as possible to the party. Characters with a Perception 16 or higher are not surprised.

- Cillian Creed, Shadow Operative
- 2 Bleak Gate dark creepers

Bleak Gate Dark Creeper

Small humanoid (dark folk), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d6 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Skills Intimidation +3, Stealth +5

Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Pack Tactics. The dark creeper has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Innate Spellcasting. The dark creeper's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At-will: *darkness*, *detect magic*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dark creeper makes two melee attacks.

Poisoned Knife. +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, becoming poisoned for 1 minute on a failure. While poisoned in this way, the target takes 3 (1d6) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The target can repeat this save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Snuff Light. A dark creeper can snuff any one nonmagical light within 50 feet. Magical lights affected by this ability are extinguished for 2d6 rounds.

Cillian Creed

Medium humanoid (human, undead), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 81 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks while not in bright light

Senses darkvision 60 ft., truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Eclipse Claw. During his accident, one of Cillian Creed's arms was transformed into the nightmarish *eclipse claw*. Once per round, Creed may inhumanly extend the appendage to give a single attack with the claw 10 feet of reach.

Deceptive Veil. Creed can maintain a convincing façade over his shadow form when necessary. At will as an action, Creed can cast conjure up a suitable disguise as though casting *disguise self* (duration is extended to permanent until dispelled).

Shadow Man. Creed's physical body can melt into shadows as a bonus action. While in areas of shadows or adjacent to a creature that casts a shadow, he can become invisible as a bonus action, as the spell *greater invisibility*. If a creature moves while he is hiding in its shadow, he can move with it up to 30 feet as a reaction.

Hidesous Reveal. Whenever Creed takes radiant damage, his shadowy flesh burns away, revealing raw muscle and sinew before his cloak of shadow reforms. He loses the benefits of his Shadow Man trait and loses all damage resistances until the end of the next turn of the creature that dealt that damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Creed makes one eclipse claw attack and one pistol attack, or two eclipse claw attacks.

Eclipse Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 16 (2d12 + 3) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage and the target must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. The target can repeat this save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Chrome Syringe. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d10) poison damage and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned, the target takes 3 (1d6) poison damage at the end of each of its turns. The target can repeat this save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If this damage reduces the character to 0 hit points, it falls unconscious and is stable.

Pistol. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage.

Immobilizing Shadows (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).

Shadowy arms emerge from the ground around Creed in a 30-foot radius. All creatures in this area must make a DC 13 Strength saving throw, becoming restrained on a failed save. Creatures not in bright light have disadvantage on this save. A creature can repeat this save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. The shadowy restraints disappear after 1 minute.





Wolfgang von Recklinghausen. A distinguished, intelligent, and poised gentleman in his late 30s, Dr. von Recklinghausen speaks elegantly with a hard-to-place accent. He appears fairly innocuous, though his sharply-groomed goatee and the rapier at his hip give him a hint of menace.

Born into wealth in Arrovia, a minor nation in the Malice Lands, Wolfgang pursued medicine and magic, learning surgery in Danor and spellcraft in Risur. But as the dwarven writings of Heid Eschatol became popular in his homeland, Wolfgang became convinced this focus on death was short-sighted in a world where resurrection was a known—if exceedingly rare—occurrence.

After years of intense study and experimentation, his marriage in tatters and his fortune nearly depleted, Wolfgang finally achieved his goal of combining medical knowledge with sorcery in order to restore a corpse to life. The party might learn more in Adventure Four, *Always on Time*, but suffice it to say that six months ago Wolfgang fled his estate and made for Risur. Traveling on a Danoran visa, the doctor hopes to reach Ber, and keep traveling as long as possible.



Tactics.

The dark creepers strike first, trying to negate the party's light sources by strategically using their *darkness* spells and following up with their snuff light ability. Creed slips in through the dark and chaos, steps beside Wolfgang, and tries to sneak attack him with an intent to knock out. If possible, Creed wants to drag an unconscious Wolfgang out while avoiding a fight, using his spare amulet to pull him through Leone's barrier of bars.

If the fight goes long, the strike team assumes they can take the party, but Creed is cautious. When he is reduced below half-health he flees to Leone.

Leone is accompanied by eight additional dark creepers, three non-combatant carriage drivers, and three horse-shaped wraiths that pull the carriages. They dramatically outnumber the party, and if any PC tries to get through the barred entrance, the dark creepers outside take up a combat position and advance, one per turn. It should be obvious to the PCs that they're pinned down.

Aftermath.

The strike team works docks security in the Bleak Gate, so they know that there is activity in the shadow plane, but they know nothing about the construction facility or the colossus. They're sternly secretive, and they know about Leone's back-up plan, so if captured, they expect to be handed over as hostages.

If the strike force fails to drag out Wolfgang, or if Creed gets the doctor but not the documents, Leone prefers not to waste any more men. He switches to his back-up plan, detailed below.

If Creed and company manage to defeat the party, they leave them for dead and scour the church until they find the documents. The church's hallowed aura keeps the PCs from dying, and several hours later they awaken when a slum-dweller tries to loot one of their bodies.

A Weight of Crumbling Stone

Social. Real-Time.

Should the ambush fail, a foe with daunting power bars the party's escape and poses escalating threats until they cave, or are caved-in.

If the strike force is defeated or driven off and Leone does not have both the doctor and the documents in his possession, he orders two of the carriages away, keeping the third in case he needs to make a quick escape. One goes to fetch a hostage, the other to retrieve enough firedust to collapse the cliff face. If either the doctor or the documents have been retrieved, Creed stashes them in the remaining carriage.

He directs his remaining men – six dark creepers and two dark stalkers – to cover the entrance. He then telekinetically pulls a metal folding chair from his carriage, as well as a metal case that contains his favorite bromago cheese and a bottle of wine from his own vineyard in Crisillyir (marked with a wax seal that a wine expert could recognize as matching Quital wine). He sits down to relax, using his telekinetic control of metal to hover a platter of cheese and cut slices as he enjoys his bottle, all while keeping an eye on the exit.

If the PCs are careful they can overhear him talking with Creed, who wears his disguise as Officer Porter, but still drips a bit of black blood. Creed says that “according to Kell,” there's only one way in or out of the church, and that the air vents are too small to climb out through. (This is not accurate.) Leone nods and tells him to “go tell his boss that the situation is under control.”

Leone wants to talk to the party, and if no PC comes to the exit, after he finishes his first cup of wine he'll call out that he wants to parlay.

From the barred exit, the party can see Leone sitting out in the open. His allies wait by the cover of the carriage, or stand out of direct line of sight, but can be heard moving about and occasionally yelling at the locals that they should keep away if they know what's good for them.

Stage One: The Easy Way.

Leone Quital introduces himself and explains that he doesn't see any reason to shed more blood. He says that he just came to get the doctor and the documents in his possession. Once he has both of those, he'll depart, and the PCs can take their time prying loose the steel bars.

If the party tries to offer other terms, Leone explains that this isn't a negotiation. If they try to stall, he says that in an hour the easy option goes away, and things get much less pleasant. He then pulls out a pocket watch, checks the time, and smiles.

If the PCs claim they don't have the documents, Leone says he's confident they're in the church somewhere. He suggests they look quickly before their hour is up. Wolfgang personally does not want to be handed over, and he thinks they should prepare a defense for when the enemy tries to dig them out, or possibly send smoke signals through the kitchen fireplace.

If the party agrees, Leone does not keep his word. He'll bend the bars to let Wolfgang or the documents out, then close them to keep



the PCs from getting any ideas. Once he has what he wants, he tells the party to wait. Skip stage two, and move to stage three.

Stage Two: Hostage.

If the party waits for an hour, a carriage arrives, and an additional dark stalker is inside, along with a hostage. This might be Lynn Kindleton, Heward Sechim, or a friend or contact of the PCs'. The person had been shadowed in preparation of this scenario, and was caught unaware by a magical sleep effect, then tossed into a carriage, bound, and blind-folded.

Leone walks the hostage to within view of the entrance and lets the party talk with them to prove that it's not an illusion. Then he revises his offer. Hand over what he wants within an hour, or he kills the hostage. He holds up his pocket watch, smiles, and then pours a cup of wine for himself and his hostage.

Wolfgang doesn't trust Leone, and would need to be convinced to trade himself for the life of someone else. If the party agrees, it goes much as above, except he puts the hostage inside the church with the party.

If the party refuses, Leone makes a show of counting down, having his men hold the hostage as he prepares to slit the hostage's throat. When the countdown reaches zero, Leone slashes open the person's jugular and tosses them to the ground in front of the entrance.

Move to stage three.

Stage Three: Death.

Eventually the other carriage arrives, bearing the materials necessary to set off an explosion and collapse the cliff face. Leone assumes this will either crush the party directly, or seal them in until they suffocate or starve. The hill is sturdy enough, though, that only the chapel will collapse, giving the party a chance to survive and find a way out.

If Leone is still pretending to be negotiating, he explains as his people set up casks of firedust and custom alchemicals that will crack the stone. He says he'll give the party five minutes to turn over what he wants, or they'll be crushed. As above, if the party concedes, Leone plans to kill them anyway.

Once it's clear he has no intention of letting them go, Leone enjoys his villainous monologue and assures them that the local slum-dwellers will definitely remember their heroism. The charges are all set in locations the PCs can't see from inside the church, and after only a few minutes Leone and his force withdraw, unspooling 30-foot fuses. They load into the carriages, and Leone triggers the fuses at range. The carriages pull away, and thirty seconds later the charges detonate.

Fighting Leone.

Leone plays a larger role in Adventure Five, *Cauldron-Born*, before finally meeting his end in Adventure Seven, *Schism*. His stats are described there. Until then, he is an undefeatable foe.

Anyone in area 1 or 3 when the explosion goes off is killed instantly. Otherwise, the party is unharmed, just assumed dead.

Sneaking Out.

The party might try to sneak away, either out the chimney or latrine tunnel during negotiations, or perhaps tearing open the exit at the last second after the fuses are lit and getting out of range before detonation.

If the PCs go out the latrine tunnel, they must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid being noticed by one of Leone's men, which would set off a chase through The Nettles. The PCs have an advantage here, since the locals have a strange fondness for the doctor, and will interfere with the pursuers.

Sneaking out the chimney easily avoids detection. If the party runs out the front entrance, one of the carriage drivers spots them fleeing, but Leone decides getting away before people investigate the explosion is more important.

Aftermath.

If nothing else, the party can survive the collapse, then be rescued by police who dig them out. Stubborn or suicidal parties can prevent the villains from getting Wolfgang or the documents, which gives them a slight leg-up on figuring out that Macbannin's their target. If the party loses both the doctor and the documents, it's a set-back, but should motivate them to finish the case.

When they finally do return to Macbannin's manor and explore his underground laboratory, they will find the doctor, if he was taken captive. 



Leone Quital. Leone plays a limited role in this adventure, and the key traits he should demonstrate are his fondness for fine bromago cheese, his mastery of steelshaping, his telekinetic control of metal, and his airy, romantic notion of honor, which the PCs should easily deduce is false when he tries to bury them alive. Leone has a larger presence in Adventures Five and Seven.