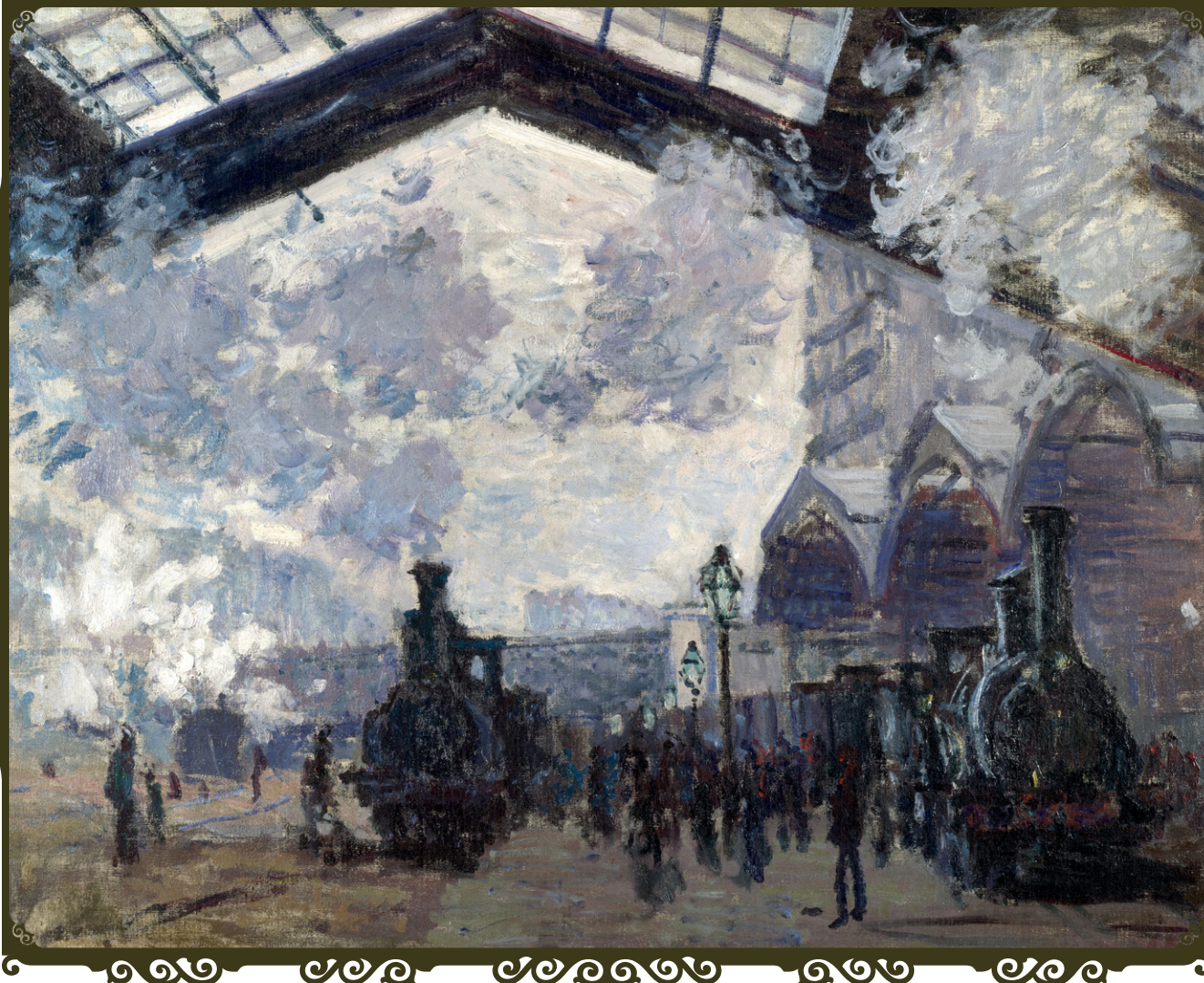




EN5ider Presents ZEITGEIST:

The Dying Skyseer

Adventure Two, Part 3

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. The first installment of *The Dying Skyseer* included the prologue and the first investigation thread, while the second installment included the second and third investigation threads. This final installment is comprised of the fourth investigation thread, the climax, and the conclusion of this adventure.

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Thread Four: Conspiracy

THIS ACT DETAILS EVENTS THAT OCCUR AFTER THE party visits Cauldron Hill, when Reed Macbannin attempts to silence those who might know about the conspiracy. These events might occur during the same days as events in the other threads, depending on when the party resolves each thread.

Factory Aflame

Action. Tactical.

It's a race against time to stop arsonists before the fire spreads out of control.

This encounter occurs after the party escorts Nevard the skyseer to Cauldron Hill's peak, shortly before sunrise of the next day. Whether the PCs rush down the mountain or take time to call in reinforcements, when they arrive the arsonists are still in the process of setting up. Only if the party truly dallies will the fire start without them.

Two red dragonborn brothers, Eberardo and Valando, have been setting fires throughout Flint for months, on orders from Cillian Creed. He met in person twice, using the guise of a nondescript businessman, then communicated solely by letters. Payments were through dead-drops. The brothers still have a few of the letters, because they're careful to check the hand-writing of new missives to make sure they're not being deceived. When they're not out burning, they have a lair in an old tunnel underneath a firegem depository in Parity Lake.

The fires have helped Lorcan Kell acquire factories from distressed owners, to smooth the flow of material to the colossus. The brothers don't know the reason for their jobs; they just enjoy lighting fires.

After the party came to Macbannin to ask about ascending Cauldron Hill, the mayor had Creed arrange for the dragonborn brothers to burn down Heward Sechim's factory. When the party actually goes up the hill, a messenger delivered a letter to the brothers, setting them into action. Now, with four human allies in tow, they begin setting up accelerants and long-burning firegems around the edge and roof of the factory.

Wildfire.

The brothers excel in burning out buildings without causing their fires to spread. However, the brothers aren't aware that a factory next door to Sechim's Alkahest & Etchings sifts firedust, which are

volatile enough to go off due to nearby heat. If the party doesn't intervene, the fire starts shortly before sunrise, burns down through the roof, and then eats out the innards of the building. But rather than leaving a husk, the heat causes the next door factory to combust, and as it burns out of control the fire spreads throughout the whole district.

The city will do its best to put out the blaze, but it is a massive operation that takes two days before the fire is contained. In the aftermath, not only have dozens of factories and hundreds of homes been destroyed, but thousands of factory workers have perished because they were locked in by their bosses. Then, rather than a low rumble of protest, the city will erupt in violent riots almost as destructive as the fires themselves.

Arson in Progress.

Most likely when the party arrives, they'll notice torches in the alley between Sechim's factory and the adjacent firedust factory. The small protests outside the two adjacent factories have dispersed this late at night, but a pair of sleepy guards stand in front of the chained doors of each. They're disinterested in the arsonists, who came with a wagon full of supplies, making them look like they were delivering material to Sechim's factory.

Valando, the pyromancer brother, has climbed to the roof and is setting up a pulley to lift the supplies. Eberardo, the warrior brother, coordinates his minions on the ground. They're fairly easy to sneak up on, and the arsonists assume people who don't come into the alley are on other business.

If the PCs approach without immediate violence, Eberardo engages them in conversation, trying to gauge their forces while encouraging them to leave and avoid a fight. Valando hides above, waiting to strike in case a fight breaks out. A character that succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check spots him.

- 4 Flint arsonists
- Valando
- Eberardo

Terrain.

Street gaslights cast bright light in a 15-foot radius and dim light for an additional 15 feet. The roof of Sechim's factory has four vents that has a miasma of noxious gas floating around them. A creature that enters or ends its turn in one of these areas takes 3 (1d6) acid damage. A water tower on top of the building could be knocked over by dealing 20 damage to it or by succeeding on a DC 15 Strength check, causing a torrent that would put out fire below and knock creatures in its path possibly over the edge of the building.

The various levels of Sechim's factory and the adjacent factories can be reached by exterior ladders. If the fight ends up inside, both buildings are cluttered with dangerous terrain.

**Flint Arsonist**

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13 (leather armor, shield)**Hit Points** 16 (3d8 + 3)**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 9**Languages** Common**Challenge** 1/4 (50 XP)**ACTIONS****Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.*Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.**Torch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.*Hit:* 2 (1d4) fire damage.**Valando**

Medium humanoid (red dragonborn), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)**Hit Points** 52 (8d8 + 16)**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +4, Arcana +5**Damage Resistances** fire**Senses** passive Perception 11**Languages** Common, Draconic**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)**Spellcasting.** Valando is a 4th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:**Cantrips (at will):** *fire bolt, produce flame, message, shocking grasp***1st level (4 slots):** *burning hands, mage armor, magic missile, misty step***2nd level (3 slots):** *continual flame, flaming sphere, scorching ray***ACTIONS****Blazing Multiattack.** When Valando makes a quarterstaff attack as an action, he can also cast *fire bolt* as a bonus action. The spell does not have disadvantage against targets within 5 feet of Valando when cast in this way.**Quarterstaff.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.**Fire Breath (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).** Valando exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. All creatures in that area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.**Gear** Valando possesses a *spell scroll of wall of fire*.**Eberardo**

Medium humanoid (dragonborn), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)**Hit Points** 90 (12d8 + 36)**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws CON +5**Skills** Acrobatics +3, Intimidation +3**Damage Resistances** fire**Senses** passive Perception 11**Languages** Common, Draconic**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)**Danger Sense.** Eberardo has advantage on Dexterity saving throws against effects that he can see, such as traps and spells so long as he is not blinded, deafened, or incapacitated.**Reckless.** At the start of his turn, Eberardo can gain advantage on all melee attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against him have advantage until the start of his next turn.**ACTIONS****Multiattack.** Eberardo makes two greatsword attacks.**Greatsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.*Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.**Fire Breath (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).** Eberardo exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. All creatures in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.**Tactics.**

As soon as possible, Valando tries to use his *spell scroll of wall of fire*—a gift from his employers that he has been itching to use in a scuffle. The arsonist wizard needs to succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence check in order to properly cast the spell due to its higher spell level. On a success, Valando targets the wall in the alley, making sure to include the space their wagon occupies, and if possible he'll curve the wall to create a barrier that blocks the PCs from reaching his brother. The wall's flames ignite the contents of the wagon, which will burn fiercely for hours unless extinguished with massive amounts of water or by applying several dice of cold damage.

The human arsonist minions consider Eberardo huge and imposing, assume this means he is mighty and brave, and expect him to stay and fight, so when they notice Eberardo is fleeing, they're a bit confused and slow to follow, which is exactly as the brothers plan, since it gives them more protection.

If either brother is slowed or trapped, though, both will stay and fight until they have an opening to run. Then they shout to each other in Draconic, and continue to flee.





Aftermath.

It's possible that, especially after surviving Cauldron Hill, the party won't be able to defeat the brothers. Thankfully, they don't want to press their luck, so the party may have to find another way to track them down. A man-hunt could turn up their lair, or the party could get help from Morgan Cippiano.

If called upon, the Family leader would use his network to offer the brothers a quick job and enough money that they could safely flee the city. He then would tip the party off so they could wait in ambush. This gives you an opportunity to use a location the party has avoided, perhaps repurposing the Waryeye shop, for example.

If the party captures the brothers, they resist talking, but when you feel it's time for the party to discover Macbannin's role, they break. The threat of execution looms, and they'll sell out their boss in exchange for being deported to Ber. Failing that, they at least want to be imprisoned somewhere away from Flint, so they don't have to worry about the families of arson victims.

They don't know Macbannin himself was involved, but they have letters Creed delivered, and they know the courier who delivered them, a freelance carriage driver named **Albert Eccleston**. Eccleston, in turn, has heard enough gossip to know that the man who gave him the letters took carriages to and from Cauldron Hill, and that various carriage drivers have figured out there's been one guy, wearing various disguises, going on different missions.

Alternately, the PCs might use magic to track the writer of the letters. Either way, after the party defeats the arsonist brothers, it's only a matter of time before they get pointed to Macbannin.

Eberardo and Valando. Infamous bandits from Ber, the red dragonborn brothers were run out of their country and came to Flint, lured by the prospect of a city powered by steam and fire. Valando (below, right) has turned youthful pyromania and a knack for spellcraft into a grand talent for arson. Eberardo (below, left), meanwhile, embraces the natural might of his race, and indeed most people assume he's a dull brute, when in truth he's nearly as clever as his wizard brother.

A smooth-talker, Eberardo comes across as a charming leader, but he has no qualms about sacrificing their allies in order to get himself and his brother out of trouble. Valando is no less determine, but he prefers to keep quiet and watch from afar, both while executing missions and also when working with potentially treacherous criminals. After years dodging the law together, the brothers have done any number of heartless things to stay alive, but they'd never betray each other.



Factory District



One square equals 5ft.



Screams and Security

Puzzle. Montage.

Unnatural energies signal a possible threat to Skyseer Nevard's imminent rally.

The evening after the party takes Nevard up Cauldron Hill, word spreads that the old skyseer is gathering a rally, to be held the next afternoon. He has called in all his favors to help increase attendance, and he claims his vision is critical to protecting Flint from disaster. The rally will occur in Bosum Strand at Dawn Square, a beautiful grassy park that can comfortably hold ten thousand people.

If the party didn't stop the arsonists, this scene could occur with the backdrop of an out of control fire and wild riots in the streets. Even if there is relative peace, Gale asked the party to protect Nevard. And if that's not enough to motivate them, their boss Stover Delft orders the party to attend the rally, because if a riot breaks out, the police are too disliked to quell it, but Nevard trusts them.

This Warrants Investigation.

The morning before the event, one or more of the party's contacts in Bosum Strand (or someone from Thinking Man's Tavern, if they need a contact) comes to the party with strange news. People are reporting an intense uneasy feeling in a several-block area, not far from Dawn Square, and the air smells like burnt engine grease. The oddity just started last night.

If the party investigates, Spirit Mediums can hear dozens of screaming voices echoing through the streets, but that still only narrows down the search a bit. Perceptive characters might notice odd slicks of oil in the streets which burn to the touch. The party might just search door to door, but the fastest method is to use the spell Gale provided to detect energy from the Bleak Gate. This leads them to a gated warehouse. There are three doors, but two are blocked from the outside with barrels and crates. The third is pad-locked, but accessible.

The warehouse contains large amounts of munitions, and is normally guarded by military forces, but they were dismissed overnight, and their replacements were never notified. If the party asks around, some kids saw a group of men wheeling crates filled with jaguars into the warehouse around midnight, then leaving and sealing it up from outside.

The situation is that Macbannin is worried Nevard might have had a vision that could warn the Unseen Court of the colossus and ruin the secrecy of their project. But the old skyseer is being careful to hide his location until the speech, so Macbannin has approved the creation of horrific creatures, infused with witchoil, that can slip through the veil from the Bleak Gate and attack during Nevard's speech.

The warehouse has been set-up as a short-term laboratory. By the time Nevard's speech begins, the place should be deserted, but the party has a chance to learn about the plan and get clues of how to disrupt it.



Monsters, Incorporated.

Inside the warehouse, eight technicians who work in the subterranean laboratory on Macbannin's manor have just finished infusing a bunch of poor jaguars with necrotic energy that rotted their flesh and left them constantly bleeding rivulets of witchoil. Tattered leather collars around their necks make them obey the commands of Cillian Creed, who holds an attuned leash.

A rusted iron ring sits on the floor of the warehouse, and it acts as partial portal between the two worlds. Inside Macbannin's laboratory, the technicians and Creed passed through a set of similar rings while wearing amulets, allowing them to shift into the Bleak Gate. They then traveled, accompanied by a golem that carried their supplies, to the warehouse's analogue in that world. By stepping into the iron ring and using the golem as a focus, they were able to shift partially back into this world.

They then performed their procedures on the jaguars, which were firmly in this world. The technicians transferred their amulets to the cats, which let them shift slightly into the Bleak Gate when they stepped into the rusted ring. Cillian Creed took the cats, now in the veil between worlds, and headed for Dawn Square to prepare the attack on Nevard.

When the PCs arrive, the technicians are stuck in a half-state, only partially in this world. They plan to clean up the monster-making studio, then step through the ring along with the golem, letting them shift enough into the Bleak Gate that they could sneak unseen back to Cauldron Hill. The PCs need to stop them before they destroy all the useful evidence.

Sneaking In.

The one door that is easily accessible, of course, is warded with an *alarm* spell that alerts the technicians. The two back doors and the windows 20 feet up are not alarmed, and the technicians are very distracted (passive Perception 5). The golem won't attack until the techs come under attack or give it orders.

- 1 bleak golem

Terrain.

The warehouse is full of crates that can be climbed to get out of the golem's reach, and catwalks above that. A chain fence cordons off the area just inside the entrance, and the gate into the rest of the warehouse is locked, but can be opened by making a successful DC 20 Dexterity check with thieves' tools.

Another chain fence surrounds the monster-making operation and the rusted ring, and it has a latch, but is not locked. The area within the laboratory fence is brightly lit by three torches; the rest of the warehouse is dimly lit.

Creatures on the opposite side of a fence have half cover.

Tactics.

The golem tries to keep the party away from the laboratory fence, and after it hits a few times it should become obvious that standing and fighting it in melee is a losing proposition, and that clustering together makes them vulnerable to its effects. If the PCs take to high ground the golem does its best to knock their perch down, or hurl crates at them if they get to the catwalk.

Bleak Golem

Large construct, neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d10 + 20)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Bleak Overdrive. The golem's defenses evolve as it takes damage. It gains the following abilities when it is reduced to the corresponding hit point thresholds.

Witchoil Wards (60 hp). At the start of each of the golem's turns, dull runes etched in its torso flash with crimson light; creatures within 5 feet of the golem when this happens must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. Creatures who fail this saving throw are deafened until the start of the golem's next turn, as the wails of the spirits in the witchoil overwhelm them. This ability is lost when *Howl of Souls* is activated.

Howl of Souls (40 hp). The howl of a hundred trapped souls issues forth from the golem's armor. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the golem or enters within that area for the first time on its turn must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. If it fails, the creature is blinded and deafened until the start of the golem's next turn. This ability is lost when *Hollow Stalker* is activated.

Hollow Stalker (20 hp). Combat damage has torn away plates of armor and cracked the golem's torso, leaving only a lean skeleton of rusted steel. The golem drips witchoil as it speeds across the battlefield. The golem's speed increases to 30 feet and it gains a climbing speed of 15 feet.

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

Witchoil Infused. The golem's body leaks witchoil from most orifices. Whenever it takes damage, all creatures within 5 feet of it take 3 (1d6) necrotic damage and gain vulnerability to radiant damage until the start of the golem's next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Meanwhile, the technicians scramble to set fire to documents and destroy supplies. The technicians take turns waiting in the center of the rusted ring, ready to flee. When the golem starts its turn, its internal structure flickers with white light, and one technician



in the circle disappears, slipping back into the Bleak Gate. A player character in the ring is unaffected; the technicians disappear in this way because they are already partially in that shadowy plane.

The techs all have an AC of 10 and 1 hit point. If injured, they fall unconscious. They can be woken and interrogated, but after 5 minutes the magic keeping them in this world fades, and they vanish into the Bleak Gate.

After all the techs are gone, the golem will try to step into the ring itself and vanish at the start of its next turn. If the party destroys the golem, they can stop the techs from escaping.

Aftermath.

If the party takes any technicians alive, they know they will fade into the Bleak Gate, so they aren't worried about being arrested, but threats can get them to talk. They were all recruited from universities and independent laboratories to work on what they were told was a project for the Risuri military, overseen by Reed Macbannin. They know nothing about the colossus, and assume their work involves weaponizing witchoil and creating monsters.

Additionally, depending on how soon the party stops the techs from escaping, they can get different levels of information.

- **8 or More Rounds.** The party can sift through burnt documents and find a sketch of a jaguar ribcage, with marks of where to attach a chest plate with screws.
- **7 Rounds.** Some documents weren't burnt; in particular, a precise description of how the chest plate protects the witchoil vial has survived.
- **6 Rounds.** Supplies for enchanting the collars survive, plus a note that anyone who holds the collar and says "Obey" can then give that cat commands.



- **5 Rounds.** A checklist can be found held to one cage by a magnet. It lists key steps in a process: "sedate cats, extract blood, remove heart, implant witchoil, attach collar and amulet, perform ritual; if error, shatter witchoil vessel; if successful, attach chest plate."
- **4 or Fewer Rounds.** Clear documented evidence survives, written in Macbannin's hand, explaining the ritual by which the cat's blood is replaced with witchoil, and admonishing the reader to "take the same precautions you would at the manor reservoir."

Dawn Square

Action. Tactical.

As thousands gather to hear the skyseer's vision, the party tries to defend him from unnatural assassins.

Nevard is scheduled to start his speech at noon, and by the time the PCs finish with the monster laboratory, the square is crowded with over three thousand people. Nearly a hundred local police officers lurk around the edges to watch traffic coming in from the dozen streets that lead to the square. Hawkers sell food from wagons throughout the square, while poets and musicians perform wherever people have clustered under trees for shade.

A large part of the turn-out is from the new docker's union Thames Grimsley has organized, which had the knock-on effect of luring hundreds of sailors whose ships are stuck in port until their cargo is loaded. Large groups chant about throwing out Danorans, and a few people scuffle as different camps argue over whether the problem is the Danorans who brought the factories, or the Risuri who are running those factories. The densest crowds, of course, cling to the handful of bars along the periphery of the square.

Depending on how Nevard's speech goes, Grimsley is prepared to march his people and whoever else will join down to the shore near the governor's mansion, to make the protest more visible. The police, in turn, plan to withdraw and set up a blockade ahead of the march so they can beat people down and force them home.

Layout.

The square stretches a half mile long, and its original checkerboard grid of stone and greenery has grown mottled with grass through years of poor maintenance. Islands of trees provide shade in grassy areas, while fountains and statues dominate the stone squares. The west end feeds into the docks of Bosum Strand, while a now-stagnant man-made lake forms the east edge.

More Villainy, Please.

If you want to spin Macbannin and his crew as more nefarious and less "shades of gray," perhaps have one of the technicians be aware of the target of their work. Then, as the other captured techs profess their ignorance, the lead tech can chuckle and mock the party, saying they'll never be able to protect the foolish old man. Ideally, a character will grab the man's collar and shake him, demanding answers as he fades into the Bleak Gate.



Creepy Warehouse



One square equals 5ft.



For major events like this one, a wooden stage stands near the lake. A sputtering old fountain lies behind the stage, surrounded by three towers capped with braziers, which provide light for night-time events. The majority of the crowd is located off the west end of the map.

Chaotic Assassination.

Creed is hidden in the veil between the Bleak Gate and the real world, able to watch but not influence. He is not willing to strike openly in such a large crowd, so he leaves the murder to his new pets. He only needs a ring of rusted iron to send them back to the real world for their attack.

Creed has infiltrated ten skeletons into the crowd, disguised in archaic white robes and porcelain masks some druid sects wear in their ceremonies. They walked in pulling a pair of ornate wagons, and the police assumed they were part of Nevard's group. The wagons each contain a hinged ring of rusted iron, which looks fairly innocuous when collapsed.

In the half hour before Nevard arrives, the skeletons drag their wagons near the corners of the stage, at the front of the crowd (on the west side of the map). Then at noon, Nevard and an entourage of a dozen (non-combatant) druids will march through the crowd and up onto stage, all while the crowd applauds and sings classic druidic chants. Once Nevard is on the stage, the skeletons will pull out the rings, snap them to full size, and drop them on the ground, at which point one flayed jaguar will step through each ring. The monsters' appearance will trigger a panic, and thousands of fleeing

people will clog the streets so police cannot come to Nevard's aid.

Creed has stationed the other three flayed jaguars near the fountain behind the stage, which has an old iron lining, long-since rusted. With attention focused on the two in front, he'll send the other three through to charge up the stage and kill Nevard.

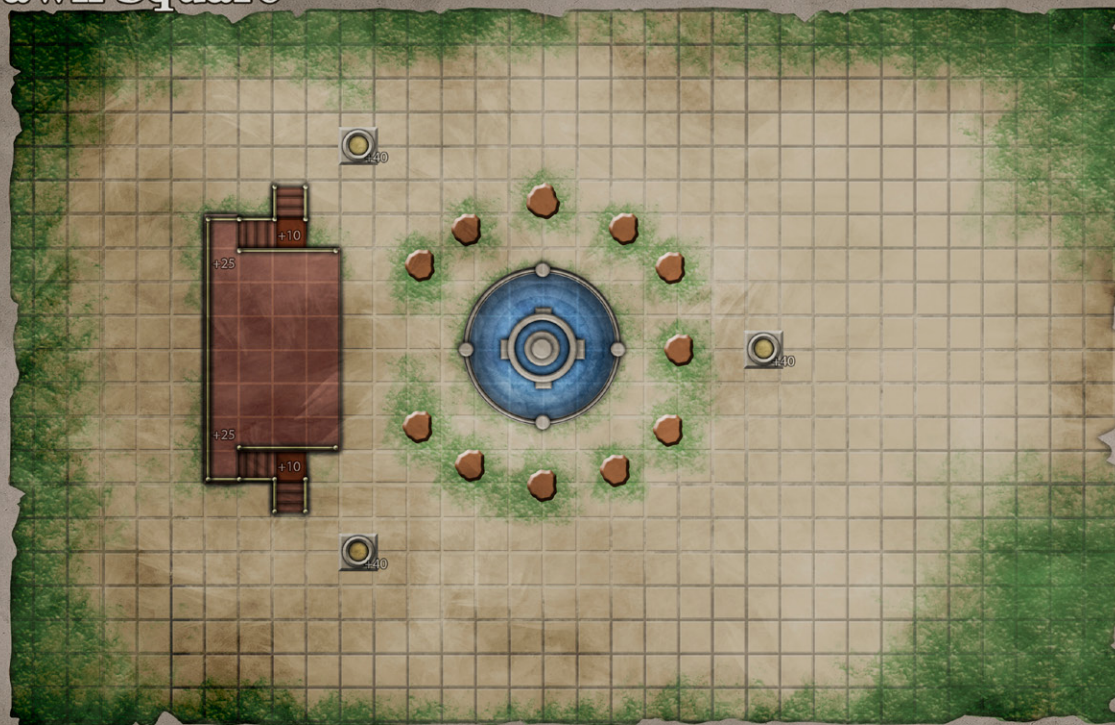
Averting the Attack.

When the party reaches the square, they likely have little time to make plans or look for threats, and they only have a narrow window to speak with Nevard, since he stays hidden until just before noon. Even if the PCs warn Nevard as he makes his way through the crowd, he says getting his message out to as many people as quickly as possible is more important than his own life. He trusted the party to protect him once before, and he'll trust them now.

The party might try standing guard on the stage, or scouring the crowd like they did while preparing for the king's arrival in Adventure One. The white-clad skeletons are easy to spot so close to stage, but only by interacting with them is it possible to tell they're not just very slender humans. If the party attacks the skeletons before they get a chance to deploy their rings, Creed can still send all five jaguars through the fountain, though the last two show up a round after the first three.

Very canny parties might check the fountain and notice its old rusted structure. By smashing the iron they could keep Creed from using the fountain as a portal, but they'd have to time things precisely to disable all three potential portals quickly enough to keep Creed from using at least one.

Dawn Square



One square equals 5ft.



Nevard's Speech.

Nevard takes the stage and holds up his hands to quiet the crowd. When he speaks, everyone in the square can hear his voice at a conversational level, courtesy of a spell by Gale.

He begins with a preamble about how the skyseers used their visions to guide Risur, and though the clarity of their future sight has faded in recent years, they believe they can still guide with their wisdom, to mediate between the conflicting forces of a changing nation. But, he says, he sensed danger was approaching, and so he sought guidance, climbing atop Cauldron Hill to once again bask in the rhythm of the heavens. And he has had a vision.

"I saw a dark figure, standing atop Cauldron Hill, towering over our city. The sun set, and he cast a shadow across Parity Lake, stretching northwest, into the sea, beyond the horizon. And also—"

It's at this point that people start screaming in the crowd just in front of the stage as a pair of fleshless jaguars dripping black blood snarl into view from beside the wagons. Two people get mauled immediately, and the crowd breaks. Terror spreads like a ripple in a pond.

- 5 flayed jaguars
- 10 disguised skeletons

Flayed Jaguar

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 50 (8d10 + 16)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

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

Pounce. If the jaguar 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 jaguar can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Witchoil Vessel. A steel plate is bolted directly into the jaguar's ribcage, and black oil leaks in pulses, like the beating of a heart. A character adjacent to the jaguar can make a DC 10 Strength check to tear free the steel plate over its chest. This check is made at disadvantage if the jaguar moved on its last turn, unless the jaguar's speed is currently 0. On a success, the jaguar takes 10 points of slashing damage, and the next attack that deals damage to it instantly kills it.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Nevard's Visions

If the party stops the monsters from ever attacking, or if they speak to him after the attack, he can share the full extent of his vision.

"I saw a dark figure, standing atop Cauldron Hill, towering over our city. The sun set, and he cast a shadow across Parity Lake, stretching northwest, into the sea, beyond the horizon. He is born in our city, but his ultimate goal is elsewhere. And also things moved in his shadow—indeed, his shadow moved before he did, for while he was mighty, he was controlled by others.

"I saw smoke hiding his face, for he was made mighty by industry. In my vision, a king chased him out to sea and defeated him by slicing him free from his shadow. But the cauldron had already shattered, and many thousands were drowned and devoured in its roil.

"I saw three birds alight on the peak, the first of black silk, the second of black steel, both weeping blood. But the third was made of stars, and it sang many songs.

"I tell you this, Cauldron Hill is not safe. Twice will danger arise, and twice will we be deceived into thinking it is safe to return, but we must avoid the place and avoid being tricked. I have arranged shelter in the Cloudwood, where people can be safe until the darkness passes."

Nevard also saw other visions, but he's less certain what these mean, so he did not plan to tell them to the public.

"A woman sat on a leather couch in a waiting room, surrounded by red curtains. She held a gold coin and rolled it across the back of her fingers. A pick lay against the side of the couch. I asked her what she was waiting for, and she answered in a language I didn't know, saying, 'The place I'm going isn't here yet.'"

"A trumpeter carried a lantern onto the stage of a darkened theater, and the people gathered for his performance applauded, then lit lanterns of their own. The theater never got bright enough for him to see their faces."

"One man tore himself in two, and his twin selves fought over a woman, tearing her into three, who ran away. Mice skittered around them, collecting cheese fallen amid the rails of a trainyard. Then a train roared down the track past me, but it had no conductor driving it. In the distance it derailed, and crushed two of the women, but he couldn't which of the three survived."

"A man carrying a bronze staff with three keyholes was assailed by swords and arrows and fire, but nothing killed him. He began to take off his robes, revealing tiger fur beneath them, while stars fell from the sky all around him. Then the sky was dark, and when the sun should have risen, instead a pale glowing cloud floated in the dark."

"Finally, I saw a tyrant and murderer in prison, hanging from twelve chains and hooks that pierced her feet, her legs, her thighs, her shoulders, her arms, and her hands. But the thirteenth hook that sealed her mouth swung loose, and it fluttered in the breeze as she whispered a map that led everywhere."



Disguised Skeleton

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Disguised. The skeleton appears to be a thin human in white robes and a mask when viewed from a distance. A creature that interacts with the skeleton can make a DC 5 Wisdom (Insight), seeing through the disguise on a success.

ACTIONS

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

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

Noncombatants.

Hundreds of people are waiting in front of the stage, and a few behind, but they flee as soon as combat begins. Nevard and a retinue of twelve people stand on the stage. His retinue all have 1 hit point and an AC of 10, but they stay on the stage unless ordered otherwise. Indeed, though they have no chance of harming the jaguars, they stand between the monsters and Nevard, hoping to protect him.

Nevard is no longer under the effects of the ritual that protected him on Cauldron Hill. A single hit might lay him low.

Terrain.

Place the two wagons by the western corners of the stage. Each is 10 ft. long and 5 ft. wide.

The high ground of the stage is easily defensible, but the cats can climb up the scaffolding by making a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check if the stairs are blocked.

Three 40-foot-tall spires form a triangle around the fountain. Each spire is capped with a gaslight lantern. Each spire just consists of a wooden truss and a thin metal pipe, and they are hazardously easy to break, requiring only a successful DC 12 Strength check to destroy. If broken, the tower crashes sideways like a sawed tree, and a geyser of flame shoots out of the ground where the spire stood. Any creature entering the square or ending its turn there takes 2d6 fire damage.

Aside from its role as portal for flayed jaguars, the ring of trees and the fountain are relatively mundane. Fleeing off the map is possible, but it's another 300 feet in any direction before reaching armed allies, and the cats are faster than Nevard by far.

Tactics.

The skeletons' last order from Creed is to ram their wagons into the spires, with the expectation being that the fire hazard will discourage Nevard from fleeing down the stairs. If possible, one skeleton makes a Strength check (DC 13) while the other four aid. Thereafter they split into groups of two or three to attack people who try to help Nevard.

The jaguars swarm the stage, but if Nevard gets away (or if the PCs manage to create a convincing fake to lure them off), the cats give chase.

Ten rounds after combat starts, police officers who managed to force their way through the panicked crowds start to reach the scene, one per round. Use **allied police officer** statistics, from Part 2 of the *Player's Guide*.

Aftermath.

The experiments on the jaguars kill them within a few hours. Even if they would survive, no, the RHC would not let the PCs keep them as pets.

If Nevard is reduced to 0 hit points, he falls unconscious but is mortally wounded beyond what the characters can possibly heal. He clings to life, wavering in and out of consciousness, long enough to touch a characters' face, close their eyes, and impart a vivid memory of his vision, before finally perishing.

If Nevard survives the immediate threat, after assuring everyone he's alright, he calls the crowds back and continues to recount his visions. That done, he lauds the party for protecting him and stopping this danger, and asks all present to trust them. Dangers will come, he warns, but there are still heroes in this world who will protect the innocent.

Then he slumps and asks all those who live in The Nettles on Cauldron Hill to prepare and leave before sunset, to come with his people to a place of safety in the Cloudwood. He expects to see one last starry sky before his heart gives out, and he would love if the people of Flint would look up tonight and stargaze with him.

Nevard has already sent letters with his vision to newspapers and gazettes in Flint and beyond, so the next morning the entire city will know his warning. People living in the slums of Cauldron Hill will begin packing up and leaving, and a day after the attack, the hill will be a veritable ghost town.

Creed's Offer

Social. Real-Time.

Knowing the investigation is near its end, Cillian Creed appeals to the patriotism of his enemy.

This scene only occurs if a character has the Yerasol Veteran theme or has made a point of being vocally patriotic toward Risur. Sometime during this thread, when they're close to figuring out Macbannin is responsible, perhaps even moments before the attack on Nevard, an urchin approaches the character in question with a note. He says a scary shadow man told him to deliver it. It reads:



You are a patriot. Already once you have defended our kingdom against enemies within its borders. Know that what you are about to reveal will damage our nation. I cannot tell you more, but if you can convince your companions to abandon this investigation, soon you will understand. I have taken no joy in conspiring to thwart you, so I give you this last chance to leave with your life.

If the party does indeed decide to give up, the earthquake still occurs, which could draw them up to Cauldron Hill for the climax.

Loose Ends

Puzzle. Montage.

If any enemies have escaped or clues have gone undiscovered, the party must redouble their efforts to solve the mystery.

Most likely the party will have discovered that Macbannin is behind the beasts that attacked Nevard, and thus is implicated in pursuing Dr. von Recklinghausen, and therefore he must be up to something nefarious revealed in the documents Nilasa stole from the Danoran consulate. The party could have the documents themselves, which while a bit complicated do back up Macbannin as the villain. Or they could have captured and interrogated the red dragonborn arsonists, and back-tracked their contacts to Cillian Creed and then Reed Macbannin.

If the party is lost, it may be because there's a loose end they need to tie up. It's likely the arsonists got away, so perhaps Family spokesman Morgan Cippiano arranges a sting where the party can capture them. If the party never went to the warehouse laboratory, the police might have arrested one of the lab technicians who got separated from the group and eventually slid back into the real world in an impossible place.

Do what you need to make sure the characters can put the pieces together. Then they have to decide how to deal with Macbannin. Their boss, Stover Delft, wants the party to at least recuperate after the fight with the cats, which will give him time to acquire a warrant to search Macbannin's manor, and give the characters time to call in a favor and get some back-up. If the party rushes in, they run the risk of getting overwhelmed and giving the villain a chance to escape. As a precaution, he recommends the party stay at a safe-house tonight.

The recommendation is smart, because if Creed knows where the characters are, he might try to kill them in their sleep. But he's wary, and won't walk into a trap. Of course, we don't actually recommend ending the adventure with each character being subdued and injected with deadly poison.

As for Macbannin, the mayor suspects he might be exposed, but he's not going to run and look guilty. He knows Governor Stanfield will cover for him, and that it's easy enough to eliminate evidence or silence witnesses. Plus, the tremors have gotten stronger since Leone Quital came over to help recover Dr. von Recklinghausen, so Macbannin wants to stay and tend to the witchoil reservoir beneath his manor. However, these same tremors will ruin his chances of keeping things quiet.



Mayor Reed Macbannin.

A long-time player in Flint politics, Macbannin's fascination with the history of Cauldron Hill led him to pursue the mayorship of The Nettles. He studied all manner of defensive magic, as well as a fair share of proscribed dark arts, in order to earn the trust of the previous mayor. Macbannin has protected the city from the curses on Cauldron Hill for over a decade now.

Despite his age and somber responsibilities, Macbannin comes across as high-energy, with a rascally sense of humor. He'll often first meet people with a stern, sour expression and brief statements of disapproval, before cracking a smile and saying he was just kidding. He loves helping people because he knows the good will of others makes him look good.

Above all, though, Macbannin is skilled at keeping secrets. He knows dangers of the Hill few would believe. He has saved the careers of other politicians by keeping his mouth shut. And currently he's coordinating the logistics needed to construct a colossus beneath his mountain. He has spoken to Governor Roland Stanfield and accepted a magical *geas* that forbids him from revealing this secret, and has done so out of a misguided belief that the project is sanctioned by Risur's king.

Climax: Macbannin's Manor

IN THIS ACT, THE PARTY'S ATTEMPT TO TAKE DOWN Mayor Reed Macbannin is interrupted by an earthquake.

Macbannin's Surrender

Social. Real-Time.

You don't think he's really going to surrender, do you?

Macbannin goes about business as usual, though he calls in a few more bodyguards than usual, including a few on Lorcan Kell's payroll. The biggest card up his sleeve, though, is the ritual, *bonds of forced faith*. The same witch-crafted magic Nevard used to provide strength to his old bones, Macbannin uses to divert all harm from him to his bodyguards.

Macbannin makes a show of coming out of his main manor and greeting the party in his garden. Cillian Creed lurks in the house, in his normal butler guise, watching through a window.



Preposterous.

Macbannin asks what they want, and after hearing their claims his expression darkens.

"So you found me out?" He shakes his fist melodramatically, "And when I was so close to finally unlocking this *mountain's dark power!*" Then he grins. "Come on, be serious," he says, with the tone of someone who's done humoring small children's fantasies. "You haven't told anyone about this yet, have you? You seem like good people—and good officers, too, I'm sure—and I wouldn't want to see you get in trouble for," he chuckles, "jumping to *wild* conclusions. I appreciate your diligence...but I have nothing to hide!"

At this, he spreads his hands wide. "Here," he says, decisively. "I'll show you I'm not up to anything. Allow me to give you the guided tour! Take as long as you want to look for anything amiss. Do we want to start in the basement? That's where the villain's always getting up to his nefarious deeds of ill import, right? Or the attic? Isn't that where the villain is always stashing the evidence of dark goings-on? Perhaps I was creative and used the pig-pen out back! What's your pleasure?"

Allow the interaction to go on for a little while, during which the characters notice house staff watching from windows and balconies, and a few gardeners not doing any work, just tense and waiting for a cue to fight. Just before tensions reach a head—when someone announces their intention to attack, or the characters agree to take the tour (which would lead to an ambush), or Macbannin is caught in a lie—the ground begins to tremble. If a character spontaneously opens hostilities, the earthquake erupts at the end of the next turn.

Earthquake

Action. Tactical.

As Cauldron Hill shakes itself apart, the party must stop Macbannin from escaping.

A titanically strong colossus lies beneath Cauldron Hill in the Bleak Gate, and of late it has strained at its bonds. Intending to use witchoil as its fuel, Macbannin has begun to pump huge amounts of the substance from a subterranean reservoir in the Bleak Gate, into a furnace in the colossus' "heart." Soon after the PCs arrive, sabotage by one of the colossus's creators (Alexander Grappa, see Adventure Five for more details), causes the colossus to thrash out of control. This shakes the mountain from within and triggers an earthquake.

Several seconds of deep rumble precedes a deafening crack as a fissure cuts through Macbannin's manor house. The rear half of the house heaves upward 10 feet, and the rest sways and crumples, threatening to collapse completely. The hiss of fluid under pressure comes from within the damaged structure, followed by the horrified screams of dozens of workers. A moment later, the wretched



stench of burnt oil wafts through the garden in a thin, visible fog, and flowers begin to wilt.

Macbannin's eyes widen with shock, but he recovers with amazing aplomb. Almost casually he shouts to the window where his butler is watching. "Creed, check the reservoir. Everybody else, kill these people for me."

The Kell-Guild thugs take the distraction as a cue to attack the party, and the house staff follow their lead.

- Mayor Reed Macbannin
- 2 Kell-Guild thugs
- 16 Macbannin house staff

Mayor Reed Macbannin

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 45 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws CON +3

Skills Arcana +6, Religion +6

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Bond of Forced Faith. Reed Macbannin is immune to all damage and conditions and has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution checks while any member of his house staff are within 150 feet. Whenever he would take damage, it affects the nearest conscious member of his house staff instead. Excess damage transfers to the next nearest conscious staff member.

Spellcasting. Reed Macbannin is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following warlock spells and regains expended spell slots when he completes a short or long rest.

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, eldritch blast, mage hand*

1st–3rd (2 3rd-level slots): *charm person, hold person, invisibility, ray of enfeeblement, suggestion, vampiric touch*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Eldritch Blast. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., two targets. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) force damage. Casting this cantrip creates two beams. Make a separate attack roll for each beam.

REACTIONS

Scholar of Hexes. Reed Macbannin knows the following hexes, which he can cast as a reaction when another creature damages him, targeting that creature. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be effected by the hex. After he uses a hex, he must complete a short or long rest before using it again.

Curse of the Cacophony: The target is deafened for 1 minute and treats all creatures as hostile to it as the mad song of the mountain

surrounds it, louder and more sadistic than ever before. At the end of each of its turns, the target can attempt to make a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to recognize the cacophony as an illusion and end the curse. An adjacent creature can also attempt to make a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check to chant a prayer that nullifies the curse until the end of the target's next turn.

Curse of the White-Eyed Doppelganger: The target perceives a perfect duplicate of itself with flat, white eyes. Whenever the target makes an attack, it must repeat the attack against itself, and perceives this as the doppelganger attacking it. The doppelganger only exists in the target's mind, and nothing can damage or affect it. At the end of each of its turns, the target can make a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check to recognize the doppelganger as illusory and end the curse. An adjacent creature can also attempt to make a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check to chant a prayer that nullifies the curse until the end of the target's next turn.

Curse of the Writhing Cauldron: Macbannin shouts "Last chance! Surrender, or I'll hollow this one out!" Sudden agony streaks up the target's throat as it vomits a black centipede, and feels a greater writhing within its guts. For the next 1 minute, whenever the target takes an action, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be reduced to half its maximum hit points. If it fails this saving throw while at or below half its maximum hit points, it dies and erupts into a mass of tiny centipedes. An adjacent creature can also attempt to make a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check to chant a prayer that nullifies the curse until the end of the target's next turn.

Gear Mayor Macbannin possesses a *potion of greater healing*.

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

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

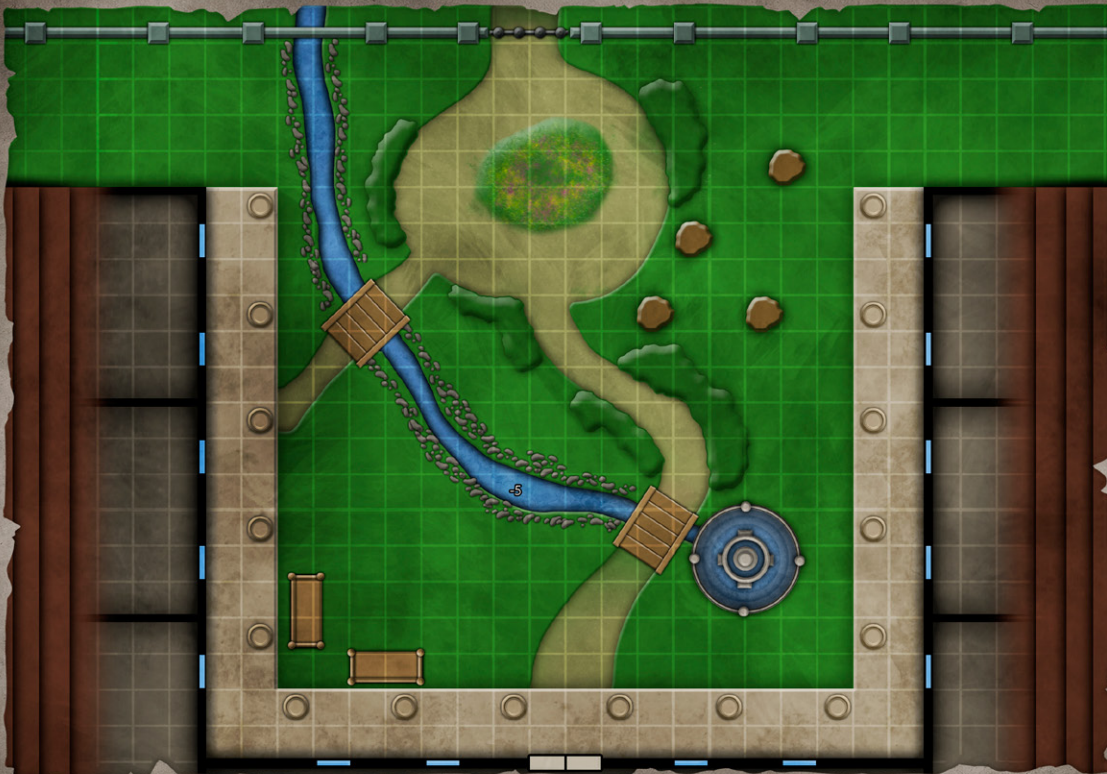
Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

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

Gear The Kell-Guild thug possesses a *potion of greater healing*.



Macbannin's Manor



One square equals 5ft.

Macbannin House Staff

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Easily Cowed. A character that makes a successful DC 10 Charisma (Intimidation) check causes the house staff to faint (falls unconscious for 1d4 minutes).

ACTIONS

Knife. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

Thrown Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 10/30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 bludgeoning damage.

Terrain.

The two Kell-guild thugs tend to the garden, trying to look innocuous while maneuvering behind the cover of hedges or benches. The garden is surrounded on three sides by a covered walkway. Pillars support balconies on the second floor, and the house staff are split between these balconies and the open windows of first floor rooms.

Between the gate and the manor, the garden is a 100-foot square, including the walkways. To represent the upheaval caused by the earthquake, each round at initiative count 20, roll a d20 and count from the west a number of squares equal to the roll, then repeat and count down from the north. This is the nexus of a sinkhole.

The sinkhole nexus and each adjacent square collapses into a 5-foot-deep pit. Any creature in the central square falls into the pit, and creatures adjacent must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful save, the creature moves 5 feet away from the sinkhole and falls prone. On a failed save, it also falls into the pit.

Repeat this each round, and whenever you create a new sinkhole, the last sinkhole begins to flood with witchoil. A creature that enters or ends its turn in a witchoil-flooded square takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.

If you create a sinkhole in a space that already has collapsed, instead a geyser of witchoil sprays high into the air, splashing the evil stuff all around. Any creature that enters or ends its turn within 2 squares of a geyser takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. If a creature enters the geyser's space, it takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and is pushed to the nearest open space.

If a sinkhole opens in a space with a column, creatures on the balcony above fall, and those below take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and are restrained by debris until they make a successful DC 13 Strength or Dexterity check to escape.

After ten rounds, the quake dies out.



Tactics.

When the earthquake begins, the Kell-guild thugs advance on the characters to keep them off Macbannin. Macbannin is wholly protected by his vile ritual as long as he has any house staff left, so he attacks the party without fear.

The house staff on the balconies use ranged attacks until they see any balcony section collapse, at which point they hurriedly climb down. The house staff on the ground level make ranged attacks as they emerge from the house, then charge and try to take down the party with force of numbers.

Aftermath.

If Macbannin and his crew defeat the party, they leave them for dead in the face of advancing slicks of witchoil. Some kindly house staff who weren't in the fight might pull the party to safety while Macbannin runs to the laboratory beneath his garden shed.

If the party triumphs, Macbannin will bargain for their help. He says that if the flow isn't stopped in his laboratory, the whole mountain will collapse, releasing all the evil spirits trapped within. He's exaggerating, and a successful DC 21 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals his deception, but if pressed he explains that he has truly gargantuan quantities of this deadly oil in his basement, and if the pressure isn't relieved it will erupt, flow down the mountain, and kill everything in its path. Of course, only he knows how to adjust the flow to avert that. He's still exaggerating.

Industrial Disaster

Action/Puzzle. Tactical.

A torrent of soul-devouring witchoil threatens the city, and the party must either stop or divert its flow while Macbannin's forces try to silence them.

Macbannin's workshop and laboratory is hidden under his garden shed. It lies partially in the Bleak Gate, and rusted ring gates restrict access so only people wearing the appropriate amulets can see and enter it.

Macbannin has spent the past several years crafting an eldritch machine to refine witchoil on a massive scale, and designing an engine suitable for the colossus which uses the oil as fuel. Secondary experiments used witchoil in the creation of golems and monsters, and at the bottom of the lab is a huge reservoir of the substance. The earthquake has damaged key components, and now the laboratory is minutes away from spawning the worst industrial disaster the world has ever seen.

Layout.

Rooms inside the laboratory Basement Level 1 are in total darkness, but when the engine in area 6 is turned on, bright lights come on. Basement Level 2 is in total darkness, and its lights have been destroyed.

1. Shed Entrance.

When the party enters, the planks covering the secret entrance have been removed, revealing a rusted ring and a seemingly solid

floor of stone. However, a woman lies dead here, clutching an armful of amulets, her body half in the ground. Her head was crushed by a falling piece of the ceiling right as she came up a spiral staircase. If the characters put on the amulets, they can see and pass through the rusted ring.

2. Lift.

A primitive elevator here can descend into the basement, but it too passes through a rusted ring, and so requires passengers to have amulets. It has no walls, just an open floor and a lever to control ascent or descent. If a character spends a minor action to control the level, at initiative count 0 the lift travels 5 feet in the desired direction.

3. Laboratory Foyer.

Toppled blackboards here list experiments scheduled in the lab. There's enough discarded paper and supplies to suggest a good dozen people managed to flee here in the past few minutes. The air stinks of burnt oil, and snarls come from the door to area 5.

4. Golem Lab.

Oil stains the floor, the mark of experiments that created the bleak golem at the warehouse, and others like it. Spare machine components sit on shelves, and pipes on the north wall dribble witchoil through tiny fissures.

5. Monster Lab.

Fresh blood streaks the floor amid dismembered bodies. Three flayed jaguars broke free from their cages during the quake, and they had no command collars, so they quickly mauled the technicians. Only one remains in this room, and it attacks madly as soon as someone opens the door.

- 1 flayed jaguar (page 11)

6. Experimental Engine.

This huge device powers the lower level control room. It is currently off. The other two flayed jaguars prowl here, pawing at the door to Area 8. They are attracted to sounds of combat, though.

The floor in front of the stairway leading down has a pressure plate. A lever on the wall can toggle the pressure plate, but if it isn't turned off, a creature that steps into the square triggers a cleansing spray of air and fresh water. This deals 7 (2d6) radiant damage to any creature with the shadow origin (such as the jaguars or Cillian Creed).

- 2 flayed jaguars (page 11)

7. Infirmary.

This room contains medical supplies, surgical tools, and anesthetic.

8. Temporary Cell.

With no better place to keep him, Macbannin locked up Wolfgang in this room, normally used by scientists sleeping in the lab overnight. The doctor is groggy, having just awoken. The mask that pumped anesthetizing gas slipped free in the quake, but his memory is still fuzzy. He just recalls being asked a lot of questions

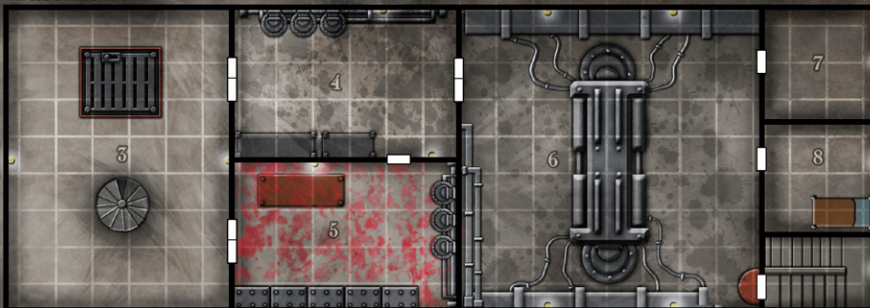


Witchoil Lab

1st Floor



Basement 1



Basement 2



One square equals 5ft.

about his philosophical stances. He was being tested, at the suggestion of Nicodemus the Gnostic, for possible recruitment to the cause. Wolfgang did not live up to their hopes, but they did learn intriguing things about his experiments.

The door to the room is locked and trapped. Instead of having a normal knob or lever, there is a slot one must reach into, such that you slip your forearm fully into the wall. Those attempting such an action activate the trap.

If Wolfgang was not captured, instead a terrified tech hides inside from the jaguars. He did not turn the trap on, in this case.

Arm Scythe Trap

Mechanical trap

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Description When activated (see above), the trap makes a melee weapon attack (+10 to hit) against the creature that activated it. On a hit, the creature takes 18 (4d6 + 4) 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. Once activated, the trap automatically resets.

9. Manual Feed Hall.

This tunnel is lined with pipes. If someone were very familiar with the system, it is possible to adjust the flow of witchoil from here, but the character must use the control room (area 10). From here, the irregular bubbling of backflowing oil can be heard, but above it all rings a shrill alarm bell from inside area 10.

10. Control Room.

Until the engine in area 6 is turned on, this room just consists of a lot of dead dials and frozen levers and knobs. An alarm rings, but it can be turned off with an easily found switch.

The northwest end of the room has no wall, but rather is open to area 12. A ladder descends, but when the characters arrive, the area below is overflowing with witchoil.

11. Supply Room.

Here the party can find pipe covers, tools, and lanterns. The north end of the room has no wall, and is open to Area 12.

12. Eldritch Machine

The walls of this lowered room are completely covered with sigils, runes, and prayers to control the tiny device at its west end. Near the edge of the platform, overlooking the basin of area 13, a section of pipe sits on a metal frame. Oil flows out one end, despite there being no source of oil from the other direction. A simple control panel manages the speed of the witchoil flow. When the characters arrive, however, this area is flooded 5 feet deep (15 feet deeper than the normal depth listed on the map), making the device inaccessible.

13. Reservoir.

Catwalks, normally 20 feet above the pool of oil, now rise only 5 feet over the perilous sludge. Giant pipes on the west end direct oil to two possible outflows. The lowest platform level of the lift stops here. The catwalks have firm railings, so creatures have advantage on checks made to avoid falling off the edge.



On the west end, two huge pipes leak witchoil from their seams. The north is labeled “Down,” and the south is labeled “Relief.”

Disaster Avoidance for Dummies.

There are four main components of the laboratory which the characters can interact with. If they can control these machines properly, they might avert a cataclysm. Characters with the Technologist theme automatically understand how these mechanisms function upon seeing them. Others must work through trial and error.

Unless otherwise noted, skill checks mentioned below require a standard action to perform.

General Hazards. A creature that ends its turn submerged in witchoil takes 7 (2d6) points of necrotic damage. It is possible to swim through the oil by succeeding on a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed check, a swimming character moves through the oil at half speed.

Wards prevent a cascade explosion from stray sparks, at least within the lab, but if an attack deals fire damage to a square of witchoil, that square and each adjacent to it, releases a burst of wailing spirits, which blinds creatures in that square until the end of their next turn. It also turns the damaged square into a viscous tar that counts as difficult terrain.

Experimental Engine (Area 6). Macbannin and his technicians have devised a massive internal combustion engine that runs on witchoil. This engine must be running in order for the control room (area 10) to work. It also provides power for the lights in Basement Level 1. The quake shut down the engine, and restarting it requires that it first be primed by succeeding on a DC 10 Intelligence check, then aligning the energized throttle with the flow from the reservoir by succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, then pulling the start cord by succeeding on a DC 10 Strength check. These three checks can be performed as a single action.

Unfortunately, the quake also damaged some valves, which can be spotted by making a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)

check. Starting the engine without first repairing them sprays the whole room with witchoil, dealing 3 (1d6) negative energy damage to a creature whenever it ends its turn in the room. The engine can be turned off as an action.

Supplies to effect repairs are in area 11, and it takes a total of five successful DC 10 Intelligence checks to repair the engine with proper supplies. The engine functions fine even if its leaks aren't repaired.

Control Room (Area 10). Various pipes, valves, and pumps can be monitored from here once power is restored. Also, the characters can activate the pumps as an action, and adjust the flow to off, slow, medium, or fast. They default to off.

At slow, 1 foot of oil is pumped out per minute (reducing the depth of the oil flood by 1 ft.). Medium pumps 1 foot per round. Fast pumps 5 feet per round. If the pumps are on *and* the eldritch machine in area 12 are both on, their effects might partially offset each other.

Eldritch Machine (Area 12). Macbannin used an eldritch machine to slice open the veil between this world and the Bleak Gate, then refine the leaking energy into liquid form. The eldritch machine, shaped like a pipe with glowing red runes, functions as an endless spigot of witchoil.

The eldritch machine sits at the edge of the ladder down to area 13. A creature next to it can as a minor action adjust the flow to Off, Slow, Medium, or Fast. The controls are easy to operate, and a red warning latch keeps people from shifting to Fast by accident. At the start of the encounter, the eldritch machine is set to Medium, but is actually submerged in 5 feet of oil, making it nigh inaccessible.

At the current flow rate, the oil will get 1 foot deeper every minute. At Slow it's 1 foot every 10 minutes; at Fast it's 1 foot per round.

If the machine is set to Off, a character can try to seal the rift by making a DC 21 Intelligence (Arcana) check as an action. On a success, the rift closes, shutting off the flow permanently. Moving or destroying the machine (AC 15, 200 hit points) also closes the rift.





Witchoil Reservoir (Area 15). Hundreds of thousands of gallons of the oil sit in a reservoir at the bottom of the laboratory. Small pipes run from the reservoir to various experiments upstairs and also deep into the mountain.

On the west wall, the large north pipe, labeled “Down,” leads hundreds of feet deeper into the mountain, and it terminates in the colossus assembly hangar. The south one, labeled “Relief,” leads sideways to vent onto the north face of Cauldron Hill, uphill from hillside slums. A heavy steel wheel on the wall can be rotated to switch the flow of witchoil between the two pipes; doing this requires a DC 10 Strength check.

When the reservoir got too deep, a fail-safe sealed the Down pipe and opened the Relief pipe, but the quake collapsed the part of the mountain the Relief pipe runs through, which has blocked flow. Now the reservoir is 15 feet deeper than the normal level, which is marked on the map.

If a character cares to commit suicide, the reservoir's bottom is 40 feet below the listed oil level.

The Problem.

The eldritch machine is pumping oil into the reservoir, but the outflow Relief pipe is crushed and blocked. If untreated, in five minutes the laboratory will be unsalvageable. Half an hour later, oil will start to bubble to the surface, and Macbannin's manor will eventually turn into a perpetual fountain of deadly oil, pouring down the side of the mountain and into Parity Lake.

The characters have to be careful if they try to fix this mess. If they turn on the engine without repairing it, they might kill themselves. When the engine turns on, pumps try to purge the overflow witchoil down the Relief pipe, which creates dangerous pressure that could eventually explode the mountain face. And even if they do things right, Cillian Creed is waiting to attack while they're distracted.

The Solutions.

The party can solve things several ways.

Ideal Solution.

This ends the flow of witchoil completely with no risk of further damage.

- Fix the engine's leaks, then turn on the engine. (Area 6)
- Switch the oil outflow from the Relief pipe to the Down pipe. (Area 13)
- Turn on the pumps. To quickly drain the reservoir, set them to Fast. (Area 10)
- Once the oil level goes down enough, switch the eldritch machine to Off. Destroy or disenchant the eldritch machine. (Area 12)
- Turn off the pumps (Area 12)

Dangerous Pressure.

If the party turns on the pumps without switching the oil outflow, pressure builds up in the Relief pipe, and oil seeps into the cracked stone of the mountain face. After 5 feet of oil is pumped down this pipe, the pipe begins to shudder and an alarm rings again. After

10 feet of oil is pumped down this pipe, metallic screeching comes from the walls, and a handful of sparks start to fly as pipes crack and scrape stone. If 15 feet of oil is pumped out this way, the underground pumps explode, and the entire reservoir of witchoil catches on fire.

Twenty rounds later, fire travels down the pipe and the northern cliff face explodes in a cloud of screaming spirits and a rain of burning necrotic tar.

Trigger Another Quake.

If the party does switch to the Down pipe, but doesn't turn off the pumps, the reservoir is emptied, which causes a horrible accident deep in the colossus construction hangar. The colossus is angered by the continued spray of witchoil, and it shakes again, provoking an aftershock. If the characters don't turn off the flow downward, the quake continues for a minute, at which point the laboratory collapses on itself.

It's worse if they do this and don't turn off the eldritch machine, in which case after the laboratory collapses, the witchoil flows down the hillside forever.

Battle Below.

Cillian Creed arrived here before the earthquake finished, and he ordered the lab technicians out. One lab tech, Kaja Stewart, crosses paths with the party in the next adventure.

When the flayed jaguars got loose, he withdrew as well, then hid at a spot on the surface where he could observe the manor's main gate and the laboratory entrance. The technicians who escaped assured him the witchoil was safe, so Creed switched to his other goals: kill the PCs and help Macbannin escape.

If the characters head to the lab but don't take Macbannin with them, Creed tries to rescue the mayor, at which point Macbannin insists they head into the laboratory to make sure the eldritch machine is shut off. Macbannin may be the villain, but he doesn't want to see his city suffer if he can avoid it. Alternately, if Macbannin defeated the characters, they might come upon Creed and Macbannin mere rounds after they have cleared out debris and reached Basement Level 1.

In either situation, Macbannin's magic lets him control the flayed jaguars, so he, Creed, and the jaguars form a deadly encounter.

More likely, though, the party has Macbannin in tow, cuffed so he cannot use magic against them. He can still run, though, and shout warnings to his allies. In this case, the party confronts the three flayed jaguars first. Then before they have a chance to rest, Creed and two **Kell-guild thugs** ambush the party, preferably after they turn on the pumps, when the noise makes it harder to hear them sneaking up.

The scoundrels descend the stairs and try to shove the PCs off ledges into witchoil, while Creed clammers down the lift cable to the platform in Area 13, and tries to attack the party from behind. Alternately, Creed might use a belt to tie the lift's handle in the “down” position, causing it to descend to area 13 and draw the party's attention while he and his allies approach from behind.

Unlike his previous encounters with the party, Creed will not flee until his enemies are silenced, or he himself is dead.



Aftermath.

By the end of this encounter it should be clear that Macbannin was working with or for some other entity. His *geas* magically prevents him from talking about the rest of the conspiracy controlled by Leone, but it's obvious that Macbannin was pumping witchoil *somewhere*. No one else at his manor knows where it was headed, though a few suspect it was for a military project, sanctioned by the king himself.

If the party failed to shut down the witchoil flow, there's either an ongoing industrial disaster as oil pours into the lake, or a short-duration one from an explosion that wiped out huge swaths of slums downhill of the manor. Luckily, the people of The Nettles heeded skyseer Nevard's warning, and everyone had evacuated beforehand.

Police and military reach the manor within a half hour and help the party take people into custody. Though player characters are notorious for their tenacity, they're just one cog in the machine of justice, and so requests to stay with Macbannin will be refused. The mayor will be held in a top-security cell in the main courthouse in Central district, but he is owed legal counsel without the presence of authorities.

The manor building itself has caught fire, and continues to burn into the night, a beacon visible as far as The Ayres.

Summons to Court

Social. Real-Time.

The party is called to testify on the events of their case, but Macbannin's ultimate fate just poses more questions.

We don't expect you to drag the party through legal proceedings, but Stover Delft tells them to get their stories straight immediately, because they'll be called to testify. Macbannin had a lot of powerful friends, and though the evidence seems overwhelming against him, any inconsistencies could sink the case.

As early as the next morning, the party is summoned to court to speak with a judge, while city governor Roland Stanfield is in attendance. A full hearing is scheduled, with as many witnesses as can be found being brought in to clear things up. Reporters and crowds of angry factory workers or disbelieving Nettles residents throng outside. Elite abjurers are present to protect the gathered officials in case Macbannin somehow attempts to use magic.

Then, when the hearing is set to begin, Macbannin is late. There's a bit of a commotion, and if the party doesn't rush to the cell themselves, the police call for them. In a secure room, past guards and dozens of witnesses, Macbannin lies dead, having smashed his head repeatedly into the wall until his skull cracked. Mingled with the smell of fresh blood is the rich smoke of leaf of Nicodemus.

The horrified guards who were watching him say he had seemed fairly amicable, as if he was looking forward to the trial. But then he swayed, slumped onto his cot, and started whispering to himself for a few minutes. They were wary in case he was trying the "sick prisoner" trick, but they knew the cell would stop him from using his magic.

A bit later he nodded, stood back up, and asked one of them if he could borrow a cigarette. He smoked slowly, and didn't talk to

Failed Investigation

If the party completely fails to pin things on Macbannin, or if the party chickens out and decides they don't want to go after a popular politician, to help keep the campaign on track you need the disaster on Cauldron Hill to still happen.

Perhaps Gale and her allies attack, and when the earthquake strikes Macbannin can't reason with her, so the laboratory explodes. Macbannin flees (and returns alive in Adventure Seven), while Creed can show up at a dramatically appropriate moment later.

Or maybe the earthquake hits and Macbannin is able to avert a catastrophe, but a few days LeBrix finds his spine and goes public with what he knows. The party might be tasked with protecting LeBrix, but Macbannin goes on the run and burns down his own manor to hide the evidence.

In either case, the party's Prestige with Risur drops and their allies suspect they might actually have been working with Macbannin the whole time.

them again until he finished. Then he thanked them, stretched his shoulders, and killed himself.

If a Spirit Medium tries to talk to Macbannin's ghost, it is not present.

What Happened?

Governor Stanfield contacted Nicodemus the Gnostic, head of the Obscurati, and informed him of the incident. Nicodemus traveled in spirit form, slipped through the walls of the courthouse, and possessed Macbannin's body. In a brief conversation, mostly internal between the two minds, Nicodemus offered Macbannin a chance to join the Ghost Council of the Obscurati. Then, with Macbannin's approval, he ended the body's life, then fled, carrying Macbannin's soul with him.

Conclusion

With the key suspect dead, the trial is wrapped up fairly quickly. The characters are in the spotlight in Flint, but they manage to avoid retribution from Macbannin's allies. There are still leads in the case, but the head of the Flint branch of the RHC, Lady Inspectress Margaret Saxby, assigns those to other agents, claiming she wants the party to take a break so their notoriety doesn't disrupt the investigation.

As they'll learn in Adventure Three, *Digging for Lies*, this is just a way of killing the case, but the party will have enough bureaucratic red tape to keep them busy for months. The city puts out the fires, but can't yet rebuild the damage on Cauldron Hill. The Nettles grow more restless and lawless, and its new mayor serves from an office in Central. Violence between factory workers and bribed police intensifies. The Ragman takes another few victims.

One week after Macbannin commits suicide, the city holds a moment of silence. Thousands attend Nevard's state funeral, and if the characters walk through the procession to view his body, they can spot Gale, observing and approving from afar. That night, the sky over Flint is clear, and the stars shine brightly, as if promising there is still a future yet unknown. 🌌