



ENsider Presents:

# The ZEITGEIST Adventure Path Campaign Guide

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**OUR HUMBLE AND SPECIAL THANKS TO** our hundreds of Kickstarter backers and Patreon patrons *and* to the many GMs and players who have experienced, commented upon, enjoyed, complimented, critiqued, and contributed to this campaign. We're your biggest fans!

# Introduction

If you plan to be a player in this adventure path, please don't read any further — this book is full of spoilers for the GM!

**W**ELCOME TO THE ZEITGEIST ADVENTURE Path. Where the Player's Guide contains vital details about the ZEITGEIST campaign world, this Campaign Guide outlines the adventures themselves and the forces opposing the PCs. Players should only read the Player's Guide, and not this document. GMs also need to be familiar with the setting to have the proper understanding of the information in this guide. You can download a free copy of the Player's Guide with your EN5IDER subscription.

Needless to say, spoilers abound.

## Contents

This Campaign Guide contains the following sections.

**Key Terms Primer.** A brief list of major names, places, and ideas in this adventure path.

**Campaign Synopsis.** Details of the conspiracy known as the Obscurati, their goals, and their membership. Also a brief overview of other main plot threads in the campaign.

**Running the Campaign.** Guidance for handling new mechanics and doling out revelations at a satisfying pace, as well as a synopsis of all thirteen adventures.

**Ancient History.** Information given out to the players over the course of thirteen adventures is compiled here for the GM's convenience.

## Join the Conspiracy!

"The motion of the stars allows different ideals to gain ascendance: war, decay, chaos, exploration, order, creation. But no longer shall the procession of heaven obey the whims of an ancient, absent clockmaker. Now the hand that moves the stars shall be ours!"

— Nicodemus the Gnostic, founder of the Obscurati

A secret cabal is constructing a magnificent machine to let them set the alignment of the multiverse, reshaping reality to reflect their ideology. As the heroes tease the conspiracy out from the shadows, adherents of other faiths and philosophies will battle to determine the spirit of a new age: the *zeitgeist*.

This guide presents an outline of the ZEITGEIST campaign from beginning to end. There is plenty of room to adjust things based on your players' actions, but an overview of the plot will help you lay the groundwork beginning with the first adventure. Climaxes, twists, and revelations are only compelling if they have been properly built up to.

## Key Terms Primer

### Geography and History.

- ♦ **Lanjyr.** The continent of the campaign, consisting of five major nations — Risur, Danor, Ber, Crisillyir, and Drakr — plus numerous weaker states, and the conquered eladrin Elfaivar Empire, now divided into many small colonies.
- ♦ **Risur.** A human kingdom, central to the campaign, whose traditional reverence for nature has begun to clash with a recent push for rapid industrialization.
- ♦ **Flint.** A major city in Risur, center of the nation's industry, and location where most of this campaign's events take place.
- ♦ **Danor.** The tiefling-ruled nation Risur has been at war with on-and-off for two centuries. The nation-wide dead magic zone prompted technological innovation, leading to today's industrial revolution.
- ♦ **Yerasol Archipelago.** Lush islands off the coast of Risur and Danor. For the past two hundred years the nations have vied for control of the archipelago.
- ♦ **The Clergy.** The foremost religion in Lanjyr, led by priests pious to various allied deities. The most revered is Triegenes, a human fisherman who allegedly rose to godhood a thousand years ago. Doctrine focuses on how divinity exists in all people, albeit with a humanocentric bent.

**Open Game Content** | The game rule information in this article is designated Open Game Content. All other material in this article, including maps and illustrations (including public domain illustrations), narrative and descriptive text, character and place names, trade dress, "EN Publishing," "EN World," "EN5IDER," "ZEITGEIST," all EN Publishing product and article titles, and EN World and EN Publishing logos, are designated Product Identity.



- ◆ **The Old Faith.** The druidic religion of Risur, concerned with appeasing nature spirits rather than praying to gods.
- ◆ **Seedism.** The ancient faith of elves, gnomes, and eladrin, based upon supplication to gods not seen in this world for millennia, with respect for the lords of the Dreaming, believed to be those gods' vassals. Seedism remains the primary religion in Elfaivar, and less orthodox sects practice their faith in small pockets in the human nations.
- ◆ **The Victories.** Two mighty wars five hundred years ago, wherein adherents of the Clergy conquered parts of the eladrin Elfaivaran Empire in a bid to stamp out Seedism. Calendars mark years starting at the end of the Second Victory, 1 A.O.V. (After Our Victory).
- ◆ **The Great Malice.** In the Second Victory, humans slew the eladrin goddess Srasama. In the aftermath, nearly every eladrin woman in the world died, which quickly led to the collapse of the Elfaivaran Empire. Simultaneously, the nation of Danor became a massive dead magic zone. It's believed Danor's affliction is a curse lain by the dying goddess, in which she sacrificed millions of followers for a final act of spite.
- ◆ **The Dreaming.** A parallel world and home to the fey, where reality tends to obey dream logic, the Dreaming is normally only accessible through powerful magic or at specific locations like crossroads or toadstool rings during specific times of the month or year.
- ◆ **The Bleak Gate.** A darker parallel world where the dead linger before they pass on to the afterlife. Only horrors and nightmares live here natively. Sounds do not echo. Seas are flat. The air is still. The sky never grows brighter than a gray gloom. Normally inaccessible to the living, except during exceedingly rare celestial events.
- ◆ **The Axis Seal.** This primordial ritual buried a massive golden plate – carved with symbols representing eight planes of the multiverse – in what was then the center of the known world. The plate acts as a seal for a portal to the rest of the multiverse, and limits access from this world to only eight others. The ritual's completion shattered the continent, and today the seal lies forgotten on an island in the Yerasol Archipelago. If it were opened, it would be possible to change what planes influence this world, or to travel the multiverse.



A MAP OF LANJYR.



## Magical Traits.

The world of ZEITGEIST has three unique magical traits due to the nature of the planes it draws energy from.

First, 200 years ago the connection to the plane of air was damaged, so now no spell or magic item can allow for permanent flight. PCs can still have flight magic of their own, but no effect ever lasts longer than five minutes, and people still react to flying mages with amazement because of how rare the magic is. Only one person in the setting, the fey terrorist Gale, has the ability to fly perpetually at the start of the adventure path.

Second, gold blocks teleportation. Line of sight for short-range teleportation cannot pass through any door or window that has even a thin wire of gold tracing its frame, and a creature wearing a ring of gold cannot teleport. Prison cells for eladrin are typically lined with threads of gold, and even beat cops usually carry a gold ring with them just in case they have to slip it on the toe of a suspect to keep them from escaping.

Third, the Axis Seal inhibits planar travel. Unless the caster has a rare and special connection to another plane (such as the king of Risur, who by the rites of rulership is connected to the Dreaming), magic cannot allow a creature to travel to another plane permanently, and even powerful effects will end abruptly after five minutes. Special celestial occurrences can create circumstances to make travel easier, and the villains of the campaign are unique for being the only people ever to figure out how to bypass this limit, and even then only to get to and from the Bleak Gate.

Make sure your players understand these limits. If someone wants to be special and break one of these limits, you're probably fine to allow it as long as you don't let them easily travel to the Dreaming or the Bleak Gate: those planes need to be hard to reach for critical plot reasons.



WILLIAM MILLER  
AKA  
NICODEMUS  
THE Gnostic



UNREST BREEDS DESTRUCTION.

## Power Groups and Modern Philosophies.

- ◆ **Risuri Homeland Constabulary.** Law enforcement sponsored by King Aodhan of Risur, tasked with pursuing threats that transcend country borders. The campaign assumes the heroes belong to this organization, but we offer several alternatives.
- ◆ **House Jierre.** A tiefling family which has come to rule Danor since the Great Malice. Proponents of industry and technology. Many scions of the family have had a hand in shaping the development of the great nations in the past five centuries.
- ◆ **The Unseen Court.** A “government” for the fey who live in the analogue of Risur in the Dreaming, obeying whims of metaphor and ruling with magically binding obligations and promises. These powerful and secretive fey have long received tribute from the mortals of Lanjyr, and they have grown disgruntled in response to recent industry, which has turned people’s minds away from their faith in the old ways. Many loyal fey have turned violent and aggressive, and rumors say the Court is just waiting for the right time to step out of the Dreaming and attack Risur.
- ◆ **The Kell Guild.** The brutish Lorcan Kell rose from a merciless gang enforcer to figurehead of Flint’s largest crime syndicate. They grew rapidly in strength when the city began building most of its factories on their turf, allowing them to extort and smuggle their way to riches.
- ◆ **The Family.** A criminal organization based out of Crisillyr, working to gain a foothold in Risur. Practices protection rackets, extortion, and smuggling, just like the Kell Guild, but with a veneer of honor and concern for the community as a whole. Though publicly opposed by the Clergy, their leadership is actually a secret sect of the faith, allowed to thrive so the church can coordinate with a unified criminal element instead of scattered gangs.
- ◆ **Heid Eschatol.** Dwarven philosophical movement concerned with the endings of things – from how best to order one’s affairs at the end of life, to how to break up with a lover, or in what manner to confront the imminent end of the world. Started in Drakr, and has migrated to universities throughout Lanjyr. Some radical factions actively seek to cause suffering so as to hasten the world’s end.
- ◆ **The Panoply.** A loose movement of anti-establishment thinkers and artists, based primarily in Ber, but rapidly making inroads among the dockers of Risur. Commonly viewed as instigators and anarchists.

## The Obscurati.

- ◆ **Nicodemus the Gnostic.** Founder and leader of the occult organization, the Obscurati, Nicodemus resents religion and superstition and seeks the ascendance of human reason. We detail his motivations and history herein, but his name should remain secret to the players until Adventure Five, and his real identity hidden until Adventure Eight at least.
- ◆ **William Miller.** A monk who five hundred years ago opposed the Second Victory and traveled to Elfaivar in a failed bid to stop the war. Though he was always a philosopher of note, he has become a heroic icon of the Panoply movement, who widely disseminate his writings among commoners and the working class.

As he witnessed the atrocities of the Second Victory, Miller grew disillusioned with the Clergy. He traveled under the name Nicodemus the Gnostic, a nickname he had earned in his monastery for his doubting and his habit for smoking “leaf of Nicodemus” (i.e., cigarettes). Historians know practically nothing about Nicodemus, and have not connected him to the philosopher William Miller.

While tending the injured after a great battle in the city of Alais Primos, Nicodemus met a similarly embittered eladrin wizardress, Kasvarina Varal, and together they strove to mitigate the religious conflict. Eventually they learned of a ritual that could give physical form to a belief, but which bound the lives of those who held that belief to the physical avatar. They tried to trick the Clergy into using the ritual to summon their own god of war – which Nicodemus and Kasvarina had a plan to slay, ending the war – but the Clergy discovered their ruse and instead invoked the eladrin goddess Srasama. When an army slew the goddess’s avatar, it had terrible consequences for the entire continent.

Nicodemus tried to stop the ritual, but the magic tore his soul from his body, allowing him to survive as a sort of untethered ghost able to possess the bodies of others. He fled as the Great Malice took effect, which did indeed end the war, but at a cost far greater than he had intended.

In the relative peace after the war’s end, Nicodemus tried to make amends. He switched back to his original name of Miller and created Pala, a small nation of thinkers and philosophers on the border of modern Danor. But in 18 A.O.V. the Clergy branded Miller a heretic, invaded Pala, and sacked its capital. He was brought to Alais Primos, the new seat of the Clergy, where he was tortured in an effort to compel a confession. After he refused to recant, his captors made a pyre of his heretical writings and burned him alive upon it.

After his second murder by the Clergy, Miller abandoned his peaceful idealism in favor of more Machiavellian techniques. He left his identity as Miller behind, allowing people to remember him as a martyr to reason, and set out to force the world to change.

After acquiring a new body, Miller met with two trusted cohorts and proposed a path to reshape the world into one free of the dangerous iconoclasy of the Clergy. Knowing any open effort would result only in the loss of more innocent lives, they formed a secret society, to become known as the Obscurati.

- ◆ **Kasvarina Varal.** A centuries-old eladrin who allied with Nicodemus during the Second Victory, managed by fluke to survive the Great Malice, and later helped found the Obscurati. Her key responsibility has been to undermine the Clergy’s military and monetary might, primarily by forming vengeance cults among her fellow surviving eladrin. More recently she oversaw the grand Colossus project, detailed below.
- ◆ **Scions of House Jierre.** Those who participated in the ritual that invoked Srasama were twisted to become tieflings. One among them, Jierre, grew horrified by what he had done and was instrumental in the creation of Miller’s short-lived philosopher state of Pala. Jierre escaped persecution and later joined the conspiracy of the Obscurati, charged with the dynastic task of establishing a nation in the dead magic zone, free from the influence of the Clergy, where reason would rise above religion.

Today, scions of House Jierre hold many key positions in the nation of Danor, including Sovereign Han Jierre.



KASVARINA  
VARAL



SOVEREIGN  
HAN JIERRE  
OF DANOR

# Campaign Synopsis

**Z**EITGEIST TAKES PLACE OVER THE COURSE OF thirteen adventures, in which the party will ascend from 1st to 20th level. Because we understand not all groups can manage the endurance to run such a long campaign, we offer a few options for abridged campaigns. In the Adventure Roster section (page 16) we explain the plots of each of the thirteen adventures, but first let us examine the narrative arc that runs through the campaign.



THE GHOST COUNCIL MEET.

## The Grand Conspiracy

Imagine if one day the whole world woke up and agreed with you.

On its broadest scale, ZEITGEIST is about the party's investigation, discovery, and fight against a conspiracy that calls itself the Obscurati, which seeks to alter the fundamental reality of the world.

In the primordial age, the world floated in a sea of many planes, its borders unprotected against incursion from hostile and maddening entities. An alliance of primitive peoples gathered the magical energies of several worlds and crafted the Axis Seal. Beneath this seal they placed icons and complex geometric patterns that linked a handful of safe slivers of the multiverse to their own world. When the ritual was complete, these slivers were pulled from the primordial sea and left to float in the heavens as a star and its orbiting planets.

These planes and the powers they represent – air, earth, fire, water, life, death, space, and time – shape the course of the world's events. If one were changed, even by merely swapping which sliver of the elemental planes became this system's plane of fire, a complex cascade of changes would alter how the world works and what its fate holds. This ancient ban is long forgotten to most, but the Obscurati seek to open it, alter the planes it links to, and seal it again. In so doing they will force the whole the world to adhere to their philosophy, and set the future on the path they desire.

For more information on the history of the Axis Seal, see Appendix One: Ancient History (page 25).

## Foundation, Ideology, and the Ghost Council.

The earliest seed of this plot was planted centuries ago by the secret society's three founders – the human philosopher Nicodemus the Gnostic, the eladrin mage Kasvarina Varal, and the tiefling aristocrat Jierre. Disillusioned with society's adherence to old beliefs, together they envisioned a world where reason and inquiry were supreme.

In their ideal world, gods would hold no sway over mortals. People would be respected for their knowledge, and enlightened self interest would drive the progress of civilization, not pettiness and tribalism. Even the poorest and weakest would be educated and uplifted. Before the public execution that led him to take the name Nicodemus, William Miller wrote much on this seemingly impossible ideal, and those texts are cherished by many poets and rebels today. But many painful, jading years have passed, and the founding dreams of the Obscurati have shifted to a darker, more pragmatic ideology.

The original Jierre has long since died, but his family holds power in Danor. The Jierre line has cultivated a competitive system for the advancement of reason and science, often with an emphasis on discrediting other nations' reliance on gods. Magic brought into Danor fades swiftly, so the religions of Lanjyr have struggled to plead their case without access to their usually persuasive toolkit of miracles. Few Danorans have any faith to speak of, which suits the Obscurati just fine. Unfortunately, the conspiracy needs magic to accomplish its

goals, so they have founded cells in other nations, and their official base of operations is in Crisillyir, on an island called Mutravir. Nevertheless, the might of Danor gives them great leverage in world politics.

Kasvarina survives, and in the centuries since El-faivar was toppled she has worked to inspire eternal resentment of the Clergy among eladrin. She ruled from a roaming castle in the Dreaming, and her direct decrees or subtle suggestions could ensure that eladrin warriors would strike and kill any foes of the conspiracy. Everyone in Lanjyr is so familiar with eladrin revenge killings that they don't imagine there's any guiding hand behind them.

Nicodemus learned how to recreate the magic that let him survive after his body was destroyed. In the following centuries, on rare occasions he has used this power to let loyal allies endure as spirits, forming a council of ghostly philosophers, scientists, and other wise men. They direct and advise the top-level actions of the Obscurati.

These undead advisors, no longer connected to the daily trials and needs of the living, have given ever more callous counsel to Nicodemus. Through centuries of setbacks, Nicodemus has held fast to his hope to create a more perfect world, but he has seen too many noble endeavors fail, watched too many friends die, and he has begun to question his vision. If he put his faith in the common people of his ideal land, he doubts they would do anything but disappoint him.

## Organizing a Conspiracy.

The structure of the Obscurati resembles a pyramid, with different threads branching off at lower tiers.

### Tier One: Triad.

Three people have final say about what course the Obscurati take: Nicodemus, Kasvarina, and whoever the scion of House Jierre is – currently Han Jierre.

### Tier Two: Ghost Council

The Ghost Council advises and tracks logistics. They review regular reports from heads of the various cells, and make decisions regarding recruitment, promotion, and – when necessary – elimination of operatives. Their primary purpose is to make sure the conspiracy's resources are deployed efficiently while minimizing the risk of discovery.

### Tier Three: Cell Leaders

The conspiracy separates its operations into three major cells and numerous minor cells, each with

delineated goals. The heads of each cell generally have authority to pursue goals as they see fit, though Nicodemus – able to move easily from body to body without arousing suspicion – checks in regularly with the cell leaders to ensure everything's running smoothly, and to field any requests.

Only rarely will leaders from two different cells meet, and in normal circumstances they are not supposed to contact each other. The leaders of the three major cells all know what the conspiracy's overall goal is, but even these trusted individuals do not know the full scope of all the conspiracy's allies and operations. Meanwhile the leaders of most minor cells have been told only that the Obscurati seeks to reward reason and selflessness. The grandiose extent of the full plan is kept secret.

Nicodemus intends to gather all the cell leaders together shortly before enacting his grand design. Partially this is because he wants reassurance that his plan to change the world is not selfish hubris. Partially it's to prepare the cell leaders so they can deal with any unforeseen consequences of the alteration. And partially it is so he can gauge their reactions and learn which cell leaders are participating only out of a desire for personal power, so that he can dispose of them. (This convocation is the focus of events in Adventure Seven, *Schism*.)

**Golden Cell.** Based in Danor, this cell is tasked with excavating the ancient seal on Axis Island, which lies in the Yerasol Archipelago, off the coasts of Risur and Danor. Additionally, this cell researches how the planar ban works, and searches for scattered smaller seals in ancient ziggurats. The cell's leaders die during Adventure One, and thereafter leadership is assumed by Lya Jierre, Danor's Minister of Outsiders and niece of Sovereign Han Jierre, the current ruler of Danor.

**Lantern Cell.** Based in the Crisillyiri city of Vendricce, this cell gathers information and performs experiments regarding different planes, so that when the Obscurati open the seal, they can choose the right collection and alignment of planes to create the world they need. They have finalized most of their research, and are in the process of researching an eldritch machine called the *wayfarer lantern*. The lantern initially makes travel between planes easier, but scaled-up versions will be placed in lighthouses and other key locations around the world to make the transition to the new world faster and smoother. **Vicemi Terio**, one of the oldest members of the Ghost Council, commands this cell.

MINISTER  
LYA JIERRE



GHOST  
COUNCILOR  
VICEMI TERIO



A WAYFARER LANTERN ALIGHT.



GOVERNOR  
ROLAND  
STANFIELD



**Colossus Cell.** Based in the city of Flint in Risur, this cell is devoted to the construction of a 300-ft. tall golem. The Obscurati will use the colossus to lift open the Axis Seal, which is one hundred feet across, 30 inches thick, and weighs over ten thousand tons. The seal's opening will unleash wild magic that is too destructive for mundane cranes, but the mighty colossus should be able to withstand it. Afterward the Obscurati plan to use the colossus as a peacekeeping weapon, in case some people choose to resist the new world order.

This massive undertaking involves building the colossus itself, smuggling industrial material and copious manpower into the city, and diverting investigations, which is possible because the cell's leader is Flint's city governor, **Roland Stanfield**.

**Minor Cells.** The conspiracy requires many other cells, mostly devoted to local needs like acquiring rare resources for other cells, scouting for talent, and killing people who learn too much. After the Ob opens the Axis Seal, these cells will be prepared to take down strong-willed leaders who resist the new world order, or destroy any monsters that might be released as an unexpected side effect of the ritual. The PCs will have only limited interactions with these cells.

**Tier Four: Major Projects**

Those in tier four are aware they're part of a conspiracy of some sort, but are given subtle misinformation by their superiors so they will not realize exactly what they are working toward. They do not even know the word "Obscurati."

Most tier four members oversee specific projects toward the overarching mission of their cell. Colossus Cell, for instance, is split into two main tier-four branches: one in the Bleak Gate, and one in the real world.

**Leone Quital** – called the Steelshaper, one of the creators of the colossus – handles operations in the shadowy plane of the Bleak Gate. **Reed Macbannin** – an expert on defense against the dark arts, and mayor of one of Flint's districts – coordinates the real-world side of things. Each man believes that Flint City Governor Roland Stanfield is building a weapon for Risur's king capable of fighting primordial entities known as the fey titans, which Risur must keep appeased lest they attack. They think the construction must be secret to avoid outrage and sabotage by the fey

LEONE  
QUITAL



MAYOR  
REED  
MACBANNIN



CAIUS  
BERGERON



**Obscurati Ring Code.**

Most officers of the Obscurati in tier three and four – and a handful in tier five – wear rings with secret codes. These serve both as an indicator of allegiance and as a focus for a magical rite that shields these officers from divination. Sometimes cell leaders give rings to their underlings as gifts, not revealing their purpose.

Each ring has a three word inscription. The first two words can be anything, as long as their initials are O.B. The number of letters in the third word indicates what tier of the conspiracy the officer is in, and the material the ring is made of identifies which cell. A gold ring is obviously Golden Cell. Silver rings mark Lantern Cell. Bronze rings indicate Colossus Cell. Most local cells use some local tree's wood, or have a specific cut and color of gem inset.

The rites of the Obscurati magically separate a person's normal identity from their role as an officer of the conspiracy. Magic that attempts to determine the identity of a conspirator wearing his ring fails outright, as if such a person did not exist. Likewise, attempts to determine whether a given person is affiliated with the Obscurati will fail.

Divinations that do not relate to his involvement with the conspiracy can function, but have a chance of yielding useless, innocuous results. Whenever a character attempts to use magic to divine an Obscurati officer's location, thoughts, status, or the like, that character must make an Arcana check (DC 34). If he fails, the magic reports something deceptive, usually in a way to lessen suspicions.

The protections these rites grant do not function if the officer does not wear his ring, nor if the diviner knows the words inscribed within his ring. That said, the leadership triad and some Obscurati officers are powerful enough to shield themselves without requiring these rites. Roland Stanfield of Colossus Cell never wears his ring.

Some rings the party is likely to discover in early adventures are:

- + Lya Jierre. Originally tier 4 Golden Cell, "One Bested Four." Later tier 3, "One Betters All."
- + Mayor Reed Macbannin. Tier 4 Colossus Cell. "Overcome Black Arts."
- + Lady Inspectress Margaret Saxby. Tier 5 Colossus Cell. "Opportunity Begets Glory."
- + Caius Bergeron. Tier 4 Golden Cell. "Old Bergeron Gold."
- + Finona Duvall. Tier 5 Golden Cell. "Original Brave Ideas."
- + Brianne "Bree" Kaldeckis. Tier 5 Golden Cell. "Oathkeeper Bree's Sword."
- + Ottavia Sacredote. Tier 4 Lantern Cell. "Orthodoxy Bolsters Gods."



and those loyal to them. Macbannin and Quital have met each other once or twice, but don't delve into each other's business.

Similarly, in Golden Cell, tier four officer **Caius Bergeron** is responsible to coordinating archaeological digs around the continent. Another tier four member (who dies off-screen in Adventure One) manages the massive excavation projects on Axis Island.

Sometimes officers will get promotions or switch cells. **Ottavia Sacredote**, previously a tier five agent in a minor cell looking for useful-but-technically-heretical information known only to the Clergy, gets promoted before Adventure Four, *Always on Time* and joins Lantern Cell when she's trusted with the mission of escorting the newly invented *wayfarer's lantern* across the continent.

### **Tier Five: Trusted Experts.**

Each cell branch requires the work of individuals with rare skills, but they are usually only exposed to small elements of the greater project. Indeed, much of the conspiracy's work appears innocuous, either as legitimate business dealings and academic research, or as illegal but mundane smuggling and violence.

Again using Colossus Cell as an example, in the real world Reed Macbannin has enlisted the head of the local office of the RHC, **Lady Inspectress Margaret Saxby**, to ensure investigations that risk revealing the conspiracy run into dead ends. She simply trusts that Macbannin – an upstanding, respected, and patriotic politician – is working for the king, and that by helping him she stands to gain power.

He also has an alliance with crime boss **Lorcan Kell**, who runs a complex smuggling operation moving industrial material into the Bleak Gate, and who won't ask questions if someone needs killing. Kell thinks he's working for a corrupt politician dabbling in dark magic.

At Macbannin's manor on haunted Cauldron Hill, **Kaja Stewart** is head arcanoscientific researcher experimenting with possible magical fuels, which she assumes is just normal military research. **Cillian Creed**, a retired spy who can change his appearance, acts as liaison to Saxby and Kell and helps eliminate any evidence that lead to Macbannin.

None of Macbannin's associates know anything about the colossus.

Meanwhile in the Bleak Gate, Leone Quital keeps his personnel divided into two main groups. The outer ring work in factories along the analogue of Parity Lake, taking smuggled materiel and assembling it into components for the colossus. This ring also includes security forces who protect them from the monsters of the Bleak Gate. The inner ring works

in a subterranean facility under Cauldron Hill, using the components to build the colossus in a massive hollow chamber beneath the mountain.

They all know they're involved in something secret – after all, they're confined to a shadowy alternate plane, prohibited from returning to the real world until the project is complete, and paid exorbitantly for their work and discretion. They have been told this is a Risuri military project.

Leone suspects there's more going on than meets the eye, but he's ambitious and intrigued by secrecy. Only two other people in the Bleak Gate facility know that the colossus is being built for a group unaffiliated with Risur. One, the slightly-insane gnome artificer **Tinker Oddcog**, known as the Gearbuilder, can talk to machines, which have told him of conversations between Leone and other secretive visitors. He doesn't particularly care, though, as long as he gets to build this grand machine.

The other, the unwilling enchanter **Alexander Grappa**, known as the Mindmaker, actually witnessed a meeting between Leone and Kasvarina and figured out more than he was supposed to. Fortunately for the Ob, Kasvarina has placed a powerful *geas* on each of the three – Steelshaper, Gearbuilder, and Mindmaker – ensuring they cannot tell outside the conspiracy about its goals.

### **Lower Tiers.**

Anyone below tier five is basically just hired help, with no special insight. They usually think they're working for some rich benefactor who values his privacy, or that they have a grant for some unusual research or activity. For instance, Roland Stanfield encouraged a businessman with an alchemical factory in Flint to make alkahest – universal solvent – so that a few vials could be smuggled by Lorcan Kell to the colossus assembly pit, where it is needed for etching wards in the adamantine skin of the titanic golem. The factory owner and all its workers are utterly oblivious that anything is going on, other than that occasionally thieves nick some of their product.

### **Specialty Gear.**

#### **Needlewire.**

When Ob cell leaders need to contact Nicodemus, they can use a unique magical compound, called *needlewire*. Injecting this fluid into a person alerts Nicodemus from anywhere in the world, and lets him possess the subject from afar. These are not full possessions, though, so Nicodemus cannot wield his full power through them. Afterward, Nicodemus returns to his original location, and the vessel remembers nothing.



OTTAVIA  
SACREDOTE



LADY  
INSPECTRESS  
MARGARET  
SAXBY



LORCAN  
KELL



KAJA  
STEWART



CILLIAN  
CREED



Normally only leaders of cells have access to this compound, though they might give some to a trusted lieutenant for a special mission requires an immediate report to the Triad. In an emergency, any bum off the street can act as a vessel for the conspiracy's mastermind.

### Witchoil.

The real world has two parallel planes – the fey Dreaming and the shadowy Bleak Gate. A veil separates these from the real world; if the veil is pierced, unusual physical manifestations appear in the real world.

Tears in the veil to the Dreaming often produce rings of toadstools, while tears leading to the Bleak Gate cause a viscous black fluid called witchoil to bubble up from the ground, smelling like burnt engine grease. Common folk have no idea that either manifestation is anything unusual, but the Obscurati have studied witchoil extensively.

Witchoil is only slightly flammable by itself, but it has the unique property of trapping the souls who die in its presence. Normally those who die pass on to the Bleak Gate and then to whatever afterlife might await, but the witchoil acts like a tiny sliver of the Bleak Gate, drawing souls into itself. A single ounce of witchoil is enough to trap a single soul, and the few scholars who know of its abilities suggest it could make resurrection magic easier. On the other hand, it seems that souls in witchoil are trapped and can never “pass on.” The theological consequences of this are unknown.

The Obscurati's interest focuses on the greatly increased combustibility of witchoil once it has been refined with souls. Normally even a single vial of witchoil is a rare commodity, but their operations on Cauldron Hill have found the veil between worlds there to be thin. Even more conveniently, thousands of years of druidic ritual sacrifices mean all the oil on Cauldron Hill comes ready for use.

While the colossus can function without any fuel, simply relying on natural magical energy around it, the Obscurati don't know exactly what it will have to cope with while opening the Axis Seal, and so have equipped it with a witchoil furnace that can power it from within even if the environmental mana changes.

In Adventure Two, *The Dying Skyseer*, witchoil threatens an industrial disaster that would poison huge swaths of Flint.

## Other Plot Threads

While the Obscurati are the main antagonists of the campaign, the party will have to deal with several other ongoing threats and movements. How they resolve these challenges will influence the allies and resources they have along the way to deal with the Obscurati.

- ◆ **Civil Unrest.** Workers distrust factory owners, the government, and the police, making Flint a bit of a powder keg.
- ◆ **Kell Guild vs. The Family.** Two criminal organizations vie for dominance in Flint, and one of them is working for the Obscurati.
- ◆ **Vekeshi Mystics and the Unseen Court.** Fey-aligned groups with goals unrelated to the conspiracy provide distractions and occasionally assistance.
- ◆ **Eschatologists.** The philosophical movement is gaining popularity in Flint, but some of its advocates are connected to a radical terrorist group from Drakr who want to bring about chaos and war.
- ◆ **Pemberton.** A prominent industrialist with genteel charm, Benedict Pemberton is actually one of the few surviving dragons, who has bided his time and is preparing to stake out his own territory again.

### Civil Unrest.

In Flint – and to a lesser extent in the cities of Ber the party visits in Adventure Six – the growth of industry is making some rich while leaving the underclass endangered and embittered. Dockers fight regularly with police and a simmering unrest threatens to break out into open riots if given enough provocation.

The party can become heroes of the common people, or be cast as agents of an uncaring government, or simply be in the middle, having to deal with recalcitrant witnesses and balancing the consequences of their actions on the people of Flint. Three major events will shape how the party is seen in their home city: Nevard's rally, the arrest of Rock Rackus, and the rampage of the colossus.

### Nevard's Rally.

In Adventure Two, in addition to saving workers from a factory arson and averting an industrial disaster when the Obscurati's research goes awry, the party can help the respected skyseer named Nevard Sechim. He calls a rally to warn people of danger he saw in a vision, and depending on how well the party has handled other threats, the public might take this warning to heart and avoid the cursed Cauldron Hill, or they might panic and start a riot.

### The Arrest of Rock Rackus.

Rock Rackus is an obnoxious and overconfident performer whom common folk love because he used to be a dock worker. At the start of Adventure Three, Rackus gets drawn into a fight against monsters that the party is fighting. One of his bullets goes awry and kills a man, giving the local police an excuse to arrest someone they

TINKER  
ODDCOG



ALEXANDER  
GRAPPA



SKYSEER  
NEVARD  
SECHIM



ROCK  
RACKUS



see as a rabble-rouser. The public sees him as a hero and might start threatening the police if he's not freed. To make things worse, a rogue vekeshi mystic finds his songs offensive to the Unseen Court and tries to have him assassinated.

For his part, Rackus is a bit too shallow to worry about the effect his lyrics have on people, but the party might be able to take more responsibility and even become a worthy face for the proletariat. Unless the party has a hand in doing him in, Rackus's dumb luck and witless charm find him stumbling into the party's affairs in later adventures, until eventually he gets his hands on the magic they need to travel the cosmos in Adventure Twelve.

### **Rampage of the Colossus.**

At the end of Adventure Five, the Obscurati's colossus breaks free prematurely, transitions into the real world from the Bleak Gate, and proceeds to tear its way through Flint. Though the party will have help here, how fast they react and how effectively they keep the colossus from crushing buildings and killing hundreds of people will determine whether the city sees them as incompetents or heroes. If the former, the following year will be filled with riots and civil unrest; if the latter, the party likely manages to keep the peace enough that when Flint is really in danger, its citizenry will be able to help.

### **Kell Guild vs. Family.**

The thieves' guild run by Lorcan Kell is the dominant power in Flint's industrial district of Parity Lake. His chief advisor, a lawyer named **Quentin Augst** who represents many of Kell's thugs when they get caught, has helped turn the savage Kell into a frightening figurehead while he handles most of the daily affairs. Police generally don't contest the guild's authority, though Kell and Augst are wary of pushing too far and ruining a good thing. Right now they can rob a little, extort a lot, and enjoy being the top dogs.

But recently a new criminal element has emerged, their base of operations in the more middle-class Stray River district. The Family is commonly known as a powerful crime syndicate from Crisillyir which is trying to expand its reach. In terms of raw might and wealth, The Family far eclipses the Kell Guild, but any fight over turf is tough.

### **Obscurati Plot.**

Kell has been working with Reed Macbannin's man Creed to smuggle industrial materiel from the factories of Parity Lake. Kell's people mark specific crates with certain magic symbols and send them down Stanfield Canal on barges. They pass under the bridges of the canal, which have been secretly lined with enchanted

rings of rusted iron, and the two magics interact to pull the crates into the Bleak Gate bit by bit. At the end of their trip, they disappear from the real world and fall into the canal in the Bleak Gate, where Obscurati agents have to use a specialized wand to finalize the transition.

In Adventure Five, the party will need to capture Kell or his advisor Quentin Augst in order to get access to this route into the Bleak Gate. The Obscurati can help him escape, and he is likely present at the adventure's big showdown.

### **Family Business.**

**Morgan Cippiano** serves as the head of The Family in Flint, and he holds his people to a higher standard of behavior than Kell. In Adventures Two and Three, he offers to reward the party if they help him smuggle weapons and drugs into the city, and he can provide useful information about the operations of the Kell Guild. In Adventure Five he'll gladly assist the RHC's attempts to take down Kell.

While Cippiano and The Family in general don't play a major role as either allies or antagonists in the first two acts of the campaign, they add some flavor and provide you and your players an avenue to make your mark on the campaign. How much the party wants to get in bed with the criminal underbelly of the city is up to the players, and Cippiano's ambitions to have leverage in Flint provides opportunities for myriad side-plots, ranging from cop procedurals to political intrigue.

The final role of The Family is to help get the party involved with events in the final four adventures. In Adventure Four, the party visits a cursed clericist vault, the Crypta Hereticarum, and Cippiano hints at his affiliation with the Clergy when he next meets the party, asking to know what happened so he can report any potential release of unholy artifacts. Later, when cataclysms start afflicting Crisillyir – where the party just so happens to be heading to recover some ancient artifacts – Cippiano's relationship with the party can give the mission more relevance and weight.

### **Vekeshi Mystics and the Unseen Court.**

The vekeshi mystics won't necessarily play a major plot role unless there is a mystic in the party. Otherwise their actions are mostly background flavor, with the occasional murder or mishap being blamed on the vekeshi.

With a vekeshi PC, however, the party might get embroiled into some of the strife between the adherents of the old faith and the modern push for industry and innovation. We establish only two prominent members of the cult in Flint. "The Old Stag," actually Rear Admiral Morris Dawkins, always conceals himself beneath



QUENTIN  
AUGST



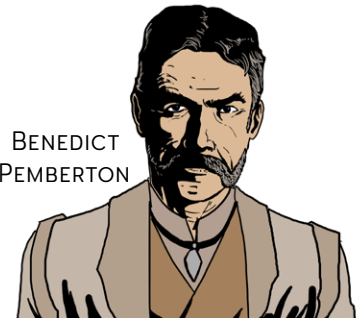
MORGAN  
CIPPIANO



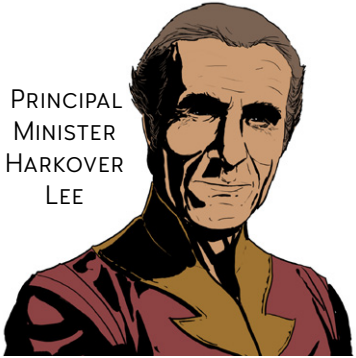
ASRABEY  
VARAL



VLENDAM  
HEID



BENEDICT  
PEMBERTON



PRINCIPAL  
MINISTER  
HARKOVER  
LEE



INATCH THE HEX-EATER

a mask with stag horns, though he could be identified by his gnarled hands. He's effectively the head of the mystics in Flint, and will occasionally give missions to a vekeshi PC. Far less prominent is Tyler Starke, a man who probably should never have been admitted into the cult, and who abuses his powers to punish those who displease him personally.

Mystic PCs will be tasked with befriending and protecting the fey terrorist Gale in Adventure Two. In Adventure Three, Tyler Starke pretends to be The Old Stag and orders the death of Rock Rackus simply because he finds the man's music offensive. Adventure Four gives a mystic PC the chance to rescue an eladrin woman about to be sold into slavery, and in Adventure Five an emissary of the Unseen Court named **Asrabey Varal** will call upon the mystics to prevent a fey lord from starting a war.

### Eschatologists.

The main involvement of eschatologists in the plot comes in the form of NPCs who are fond of philosophical discussions. Mostly this helps lend a different air to ZEITGEIST by emphasizing the competition of moral ideologies over a simple dichotomy of good vs. evil. A few eschatologists cross the party's path, and they even get to meet the movement's found **Vlendam Heid** in Adventure Four, but they don't become a major part of the campaign until Adventure Five, when a group of terrorist who follow the teaching of radical eschatologist **Grandis Komanov** attacks Flint.

If you have an eschatologist PC, you might involve him in the development of a club of philosophers in Flint, and have many members be eschatologists. At some point during Adventure Three have a visitor from Drakr come speak and present the more radical position of Komanov: not simply to prepare for proper endings, but to help bring about the end of things. While the philosophers might dismiss him as an anarchist, it could give the PC a connection to the later threat posed by the radicals.

Komanov and her radicals never rise to "top tier" villain status, but in Adventure Eleven they make a bid to wipe out Drakr with the aid of the Lost Riders, who

have returned now that the world has changed, and they may decide to aid in the Voice of Rot's bid to actually destroy the world.

### Benedict Pemberton.

The industrialist **Benedict Pemberton** shows up early on only as a name behind a company making grand technological innovations, with a specialty in humanoid automatons. The party might visit his company's tent in the Kaybeau Arms Fair in Adventure Three, but otherwise he doesn't make an impact until Adventure Six.

That adventure sees the party head to Ber to chase **Tinker Oddcog**, designer of the colossus, who's on the run from the Obscurati's agents. Unbeknownst to both the PCs and the conspiracy, Tinker will have already been picked up by Pemberton, who uses him to design grand weapons of war.

In truth, Benedict Pemberton was once the dragon tyrant **Gradiax, Lord of Steel**. Two hundred years ago when the world's link to plane of air was damaged, all dragons lost the ability to fly, making them easy pickings for adventurers. Gradiax went into hiding, remade himself as a wealthy land-owner, and by pretending generation after generation to be men of the same family he took on the role of industrialist, seeing a chance to retake control of the land that was once his.

Though his plans are grandiose, Pemberton enjoys playing the role of a wizened geezer with folksy charm. When the party thwarts him he initially seeks revenge by disrupting their later missions to confront the Obscurati, but eventually he realizes that the Ob are a threat even to him. By Adventure Nine he's even willing to lend them a little aid, and in the last four adventures he tries to join their side to take down the conspiracy, with the understanding that in the aftermath he'll have earned the right to be in charge of his own country.

On a related note, **Principal Minister Harkover Lee**, the highest advisor to Risur's king, was also once a dragon known as **Inatch the Hex-Eater**. He long ago forsook his draconic identity, but he keeps watch on Pemberton, afraid of the man's ambition.





THE COLOSSUS IS BORN.

## Revelation Timeline.

The campaign saga revolves around the Obscurati trying to keep its various secrets. The adventures are designed to reveal them to the party a bit at a time. Later in the campaign, the PCs begin to build a conspiracy of their own and figure out how to undo the villains' plot.

If somehow the party finds out or figures out something prematurely, it doesn't ruin the campaign, because the adventures link actual existential threats to these revelations. Even if you already know by the end of Adventure Two that they're building a colossus in the Bleak Gate, attacking their facility alone would be suicide, so you need evidence to convince the higher-ups. Adventures Three and Four give the party ways to find that evidence, though you should feel free to shuffle events or speed up the timeline to match the party's efforts.

Here are the main revelations of each adventure.

**Adventure Two.** A conspiracy hiding in the Bleak Gate is smuggling in materials somehow for a mysterious construction project.

**Adventure Three.** The conspiracy is studying ancient magic tied to planar travel, which might explain how they're able to so easily reach the Bleak Gate. They call themselves the Obscurati.

**Adventure Four.** The Obscurati have invented a device that weaponizes extraplanar energy, and Lya Jierre, the king's fiancée, is part of the plot.

**Adventure Five.** Holy crap, they've built a 300-ft. tall colossus!

**Adventure Six.** Alexander Grappa, a former member of the Obscurati who helped design the colossus, is hiding in Drakr, and knows

where the conspiracy will be meeting.

**Adventure Seven.** Their ultimate plan is to alter the fabric of reality, but many in the conspiracy disagree with the plans of their leader, Nicodemus the Gnostic. Kasvarina Varal was once co-leader of the conspiracy, and might be able to unite the Obscurati against Nicodemus.

**Adventure Eight.** Kasvarina and Nicodemus were responsible for the Great Malice. The Obscurati plan to assassinate the king of Risur and perform a ritual in Flint to make the country succumb to their new world order.

**Adventure Nine.** The actual core of the ritual wasn't in Flint, but on distant Axis Island. (At this point, the PCs might manage to protect Risur, but most of the world falls under the control of the Obscurati.)

**Adventure Ten.** The ritual that can change things back will require three key components: an accurate map of the multiverse, a machine to properly calibrate planar energies, and energy gathered from those planes.

**Adventure Eleven.** We have pieces one and two, but piece three requires dying and traveling to the graveyard of the multiverse.

**Adventure Twelve.** We have piece three, and we have learned a separate ritual that will make us strong enough to withstand the chaos at the Axis Seal, and to defend against the might of the Obscurati.

**Adventure Thirteen.** One last question remains: what shall we make in this new world?

# Running the Campaign

**T**HE ZEITGEIST CAMPAIGN SAGA PRESENTS A FEW challenges traditional fantasy adventures don't.

We hope to make it easy for you to handle those issues.

## Prestige

The Player's Guide introduces the Prestige mechanic. For each of the five following groups, you will need to keep track of the party's Prestige rating. During the course of the campaign, the party's Prestige with each particular group will affect how the members of that group interact with the PCs.

### Flint.

Saving the city and treating its workers well can earn the PCs support from a public normally tight-lipped around law enforcement. Key moments in earning Flint Prestige are averting a factory district fire and industrial accident in Adventure Two, getting celebrity docker Rock Rackus off from murder charges in Adventure Three, and driving off the rampaging colossus in Adventure Five.

### Risur.

High Prestige here earns promotions, access to better equipment, and the trust of officials who might otherwise be skeptical of wild conspiracy claims. Major moments that earn Risur prestige are arresting Reed Macbannin in Adventure Two, defending the RHC headquarters in Adventure Three, completing the spy mission in Adventure Four, and helping the king banish the rampaging colossus in Adventure Five.

### Unseen Court.

Those favored by the Court will be well received by the local fey of Flint, those who follow the old druidic faith, and vekeshi mystics in positions of authority. The party can earn prestige with the Unseen Court by meeting peacefully with the fey terrorist Gale in Adventure Two, fulfilling the command of the Voice of Rot in Adventure Three, rescuing the eladrin Isobel in Adventure Four, and stopping the fey lord Ekossigan in Adventure Five.

### Clergy.

The party's early interactions with The Family criminal organization may filter up the chain of command to the priests who endorse the crime syndicate. The party can get noticed by the Clergy through helping The Family with smuggling in Adventure Two, by sneaking into the Crypta Hereticarum in Adventure Four, and by helping The Family replace the Kell Guild as the primary criminal organization in Flint in Adventure Five, but they likely won't interact directly with the Clergy proper until much later in the campaign.

### Obscurati.

Intellectuals and creative geniuses who show disdain for the status quo might be approached by recruiters, or even asked to act as double agents. Normally, though, prestige with this group just reflects the conspiracy marking the party as dangerous opponents. Starting with Adventure Five, the Obscurati will generally try to ambush or assassinate the PCs at least once every adventure.

## Tracking Prestige.

The party starts with Prestige 1 for each group listed above. At the end of an adventure, the party might gain a point of Prestige if they served the group's interests or thwarted one of their plots. If the party fails publicly and disastrously, their Prestige might suffer, or even drop straight to 0 until they clear their names.

Usually you just need to track the party as a whole, but some situations will depend on individual PC traits and actions. You might also want to steer each PC toward a different group, to let that PC be the "face" of the party for that group.

For instance, the Clergy – as represented by Morgan Cippiano, the head of The Family – might interact primarily with the party's Spirit Medium ranger, while the Unseen Court's affiliates like Gale or Asrabey liaise through the Skyseer wizard. The Obscurati might try to tempt the Technologist assassin into becoming a double agent, and the Yerasol Veteran knight might be pushed by Viscount Inspector Nigel Price-Hill to pursue politics, while the Eschatologist cleric finds his likeness painted across Flint as he becomes an unlikely local hero.

We expect that by the end of Adventure Five, most groups will reach Prestige 5 with Flint, Risur, and the Obscurati, and Prestige 3 with the Unseen Court and Clergy. By the end of Adventure Nine, likely they'll have Prestige 4 to 6 with nearly every group. This may vary if the party takes pains to cozy up with certain groups or if they go to great lengths to remain discreet.

## Mystery Guide

One of the key challenges in running a campaign with a long-term mystery is balancing how much to reveal about major secrets. You want to keep the players interested in the mystery, but make them work for clues. And when it comes to the big reveal, playing your hand too soon or too late can ruin its impact.

Each adventure will details what secrets the PCs might discover in the course of the adventure. Some secrets you need to make sure the PCs discover, or else they won't be able to advance their investigation. Others you should try to keep hidden, but be prepared in case the PCs do something unorthodox and crack the case prematurely. Then there are a few that can go either way, which can sate the curiosity of players who put in extra effort to find answers.

For instance, in the first adventure, the PCs visit the island that is the key to the Obscurati's entire plan, but the most likely course of



action will just leave them thinking the place has strange magic and a few arcane factories. If they decide to detour from their mission and explore the island's interior, they can stumble upon evidence of a much more substantial project: a massive canal is being built to drain a lake because the Axis Seal lies beneath that lake; surveyors have drawn maps of magical energy nexuses to locate subterranean control pillars; mighty golems guard research bunkers with various eldritch experiments involving elemental energies.

Players who find these shouldn't be able to put the pieces together yet, but if they happen to guess correctly, no one with authority will believe them without evidence. If they make a big deal about it, many would regard them as kooks, like Mulder in *The X-Files*. And if for some reason you have the party find a letter explaining the entire plan in Adventure One,\* the Obscurati still have a massive, geographically distributed organization that must be tracked down and defeated.

So don't worry if you accidentally give away some clues prematurely, or if the players manage to guess some major secret. While we think the thrill of the unknown is a great motivator for players, even if the twist is revealed early, there's still plenty of adventure and heroism needed to stop the villains.

## Miscellaneous

A few other issues you should keep in mind throughout the campaign.

### Using the Adventures.

Each adventure is divided into acts, to help you pace your game sessions, and each act is divided into scenes. Each scene is presented in a format of Title, keywords, and tag-line. Keywords include:

**Scene Type:** Action, Exploration, Exposition, Puzzle, Social, or Hybrid.

**Duration:** Montage (a few hours or days), Real-time (a few minutes), or Tactical (round-by-round).

For example:

#### Crowd Security

**Social. Real-Time. Level 1.**

*A crowd of hundreds waits at a security checkpoint. In half an hour they'll line up along streets to cheer the king's arrival, and you must make sure no one dangerous gets through.*

To set the tone for the campaign, the first encounter is a quick investigation. Thousands of visitors have poured into the city, hoping to see the king. They've gathered in Royal Square, on the mainland side of a bridge that leads to the Royal Shipyard. The police are counting off exactly seven hundred people who will be let onto the bridge and into Fleet Square on the shipyard island so that they can cheer...



\* **Important Disclaimer:** Please don't do that.

### Your Majesty.

One of the PCs is likely to end up king or queen of Risur at the end of Adventure Nine. If you have a likely candidate, give him or her opportunities to lead and inspire.

### Technology and Allies.

In a world where the PCs can just buy explosives, and where their connections let them call in reinforcements if they know a fight is coming, we've had to design our adventures a little differently. Consequently, you as GM may need to encourage the players to take advantage of these sorts of resources, or else they're missing out on some of the potential of the setting.

### Using Character Themes.

Though we make sure to include at least some events or characters in each adventure that resonate with all the ZEITGEIST character themes, it ultimately falls to you to turn them from vignettes to key parts of an ongoing story. We offer more hooks early on than in later adventures, since we can't predict how your players will develop their connections to their themes. Some characters might even let their original themes fade into the background as they get interested in other aspects of the setting.

### Side Missions.

Don't be afraid to add some extra missions for the party to pursue that aren't related to the Obscurati plot. Try using the events listed in the "Meanwhile in the News" sidebar that accompanies each adventure to show that the party isn't always just dealing with one massive conspiracy. Even *The X-Files* had that episode with a murder at a carnival.

One example would be the hunt for a killer known as The Ragman. Is it a monster? A vivisectionist serial killer? A warlock who must fulfill a dark pact with a fiend? Or just a bit of background flavor that the party never deals with? It's up to you.

### A Tall Ship.

We've tried to work a number of ship-based encounters into the saga to help emphasize the technological differences between the world of ZEITGEIST and a standard fantasy world. For example, the characters have the opportunity to take a small cutter to blockade smugglers in Flint Harbor, then battle a mercenary vessel for access to a sunken ziggurat – later in the campaign, the party's missions take them into hostile waters aboard more powerful ships. They can keep and customize a vessel, enhancing its defenses or firepower, or even trade up to larger ships. In Adventure Ten they can even climb aboard the first airship the world has ever seen.

### Put that Liberal Arts Degree to Good Use.

You can easily run this campaign as an action-adventure mystery, paying little attention to the various ideological conflicts and focusing instead upon the more immediate threat posed to the PCs and their homeland. But if you and your players have an inclination toward philosophy, in the campaign's climactic confrontation the PCs can launch into a lively debate with Nicodemus during battle in an attempt to turn the colossus Borne to their side, winning the day through words and ideas moreso than physical might.



## Adventure Roster

To help you plan for the campaign, we present a brief synopsis of each adventure, as well as suggestions for if you need to abridge the series.

### Act One: The Investigation Begins.

The PCs investigate plots against their homeland as it seeks a peace treaty with its greatest enemy.

#### *Adventure One: The Island at the Axis of the World.*

**Author** Ryan Nock • *After thwarting an assassination, the party is sent to track down the king's traitorous sister on a Danoran island before she can provoke a war.*

**Date:** Spring of 500 A.O.V. • **Party Level:** 3.

In their first major mission for the Royal Homeland Constabulary, the party stumbles upon a plot to assassinate King Aodhan during the maiden voyage of Risur's first steam-powered battleship, the R.N.S. *Coaltongue*. The king's traitorous sister, Duchess Ethelyn of Shale, has close ties to the Unseen Court and seems to have attempted her coup to stop a peace treaty that would bring more Danoran industry to Risur.

The duchess flees and, with a small army at her side, conquers distant Axis Island, a seemingly inconsequential piece of land home to strange planar magic. It is also home to a Danoran fortress – and secretly is the center of the Obscurati's entire plot, for beneath the island lies the Axis Seal. Guided by a skyseer prophecy, the duchess hopes to find proof that Risur is being manipulated by hostile forces.

The party's boss, Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft, calls a meeting with Danor's Minister of Outsiders, Lya Jierre. She briefs the PCs on the island's defenses and explains that to maintain the peace she can give Risur a few days to remove the duchess; otherwise,

Danor will consider her attack an act of war. The party is sent on a critical mission to infiltrate the fortress the duchess has occupied and open a sea gate so Risur's navy can stage an amphibious assault and capture her.

The party finds the island full of odd magic, and if they explore they see clues of massive Danoran projects researching arcanoscience as well as archaeology. The mission is time-sensitive, though, preventing thorough investigations.

Once the PCs open the sea gate they can rest while marines storm the fortress, but mid-battle a mighty eladrin warrior, Asrabey Varal, enters the fortress and tears his way through both sides of the conflict. Asrabey is a husband of Kasvarina Varal, and she has sent him to silence the duchess, under the premise that Risur must be shown the Unseen Court does not approve of her assassination attempt. Conveniently it lets the Obscurati keep their secrets without any blame falling upon Danor.

By the time Asrabey reaches the duchess, though, he has battled hundreds of warriors and his stamina is nearly spent. If the PCs follow in his wake they have a chance to learn what the duchess has found, but they'll have to decide whether they'll risk a fight against even a weakened Asrabey in order to bring the traitorous duchess in alive.

In the denouement, the PCs witness the Danorans coming to reclaim the island. Lya Jierre thanks them, and reveals that she is to be King Aodhan's bride. The PCs should come away distrustful of this future villain, and wondering what exactly Danor is up to while being unable – for now – to investigate further.

**Big Scenes:** Chasing saboteurs through the bowels of a warship while a brass band on deck plays the national anthem. Facing an eladrin dreadnought with a flaming sword and a roaring lion shield, and deciding just how committed you are to your mission.



MINISTER LYA JIERRE WAITS WHILE HER SHIP DOCKS.





### ***Adventure Two: The Dying Skyseer.***

**Author** Ryan Nock • *Amid civil turmoil, investigate a murder, unearth a smuggling operation, and take down a politically powerful noble coordinating various criminal endeavors for the Obscurati.*

**Date:** Summer of 500 A.O.V. • **Party Level:** 4-5.

Several months later, all is back to normal in Flint, except for the occasional unusual tremor. The party's new mission – to capture or kill the fey terrorist Gale who has been sabotaging factories – brings them to a murder scene at the Danoran consulate. An associate of Gale's was killed in a robbery, but the circumstances of her death are unusual, and the consulate staff are being cagey.

Chasing leads, the PCs find Gale working with The Family to smuggle wands into the city, and learn that the victim is related to an infirm but respected skyseer, Nevard Sechim, a regular contact of Gale. More mysteriously, a foreign doctor named Wolfgang von Recklinghausen was handed a bundle of documents by the victim as she was dying and has fled to parts unknown. Clearly something was stolen from the consulate worth killing for, and the RHC is not the only group who want it back.

These three threads interweave: pursuit of the doctor leads to crime boss Lorcan Kell, who'll hand him over if the party stops The Family's wand smuggling. Meanwhile, Nevard offers to get the party in touch with Gale if they do him a favor: he seeks a vision, but needs to stand upon the cursed mountain Cauldron Hill to see above the haze of pollution that clings to the city, and he wants the party as his bodyguards.

To get permission to climb the hill, the party must ask Mayor Reed Macbannin, the man actively trying to stop their investigation, since the documents von Recklinghausen carries can reveal his whole illegal operation with Kell. He lets the party head up with Nevard, then sends his operative Cillian Creed to arrange their demise.

If they survive, the PCs can follow other clues while Nevard

prepares to reveal his vision to the whole city. Gale warns of mysterious goings-on in the Bleak Gate, The Family tries to get the party to help in their fight against Kell, and Macbannin tries to tie up loose ends with the aid of arsonists who threaten to set half the industrial district ablaze.

With Gale's help, the party can track down a facility using captured souls as ritual components to create shadowy monsters, a few of which have already been sent to kill Nevard before he can reveal his prophecy. Nevard manages to share his vision – perhaps only with his dying breath if the party fails to protect him – and warns that three dooms shall befall Cauldron Hill.

When the party can finally manage to track down von Recklinghausen, one final ambush – led by Leone Quital the steelshaper – nearly buries them in a cave-in, but should they survive they find sufficient evidence to arrest Macbannin.

Macbannin understandably tries to resist being taken in, but at that same moment the tremors the city has been suffering from (secretly caused by trouble with the colossus Borne being built under Cauldron Hill) become a full-fledged earthquake. Macbannin's manor begins to crumble, and toxic witchoil being refined elsewhere on his compound starts to spray up from the ground. The party must shut down Macbannin's witchoil laboratory before it explodes and pours the deadly substance down the side of the mountain.

Before Macbannin can be tried or magically interrogated, he commits suicide in his cell.

**Big Scenes:** A chaotic ship-to-ship skirmish against wand smugglers in the black of night. Holding off eerie predators of the spirit world as a dying prophet seeks a vision. Ambushing a pair of dragon-born arsonists by a factory they're about to burn down. Storming a mountain villa to arrest the mastermind as an earthquake unleashes a landslide of necromantic oil.



SKYSEER NEVARD SECHIM CONTEMPLATES THE HEAVENS.



### Adventure Three: Digging for Lies.

Author Matthew J. Hanson • *Discover a conspiracy researching an ancient magic ritual. Thwart a test run that targets you directly.*

Date: Fall of 500 A.O.V. • Party Level: 6–7.

Lady Inspectress Margaret Saxby, the head of the Flint branch of the RHC, takes the party off the Macbannin conspiracy case for “political reasons,” and assigns them as simple security guards to an international arms fair, where she hopes they won’t cause any trouble.

At the fair, though, they battle horrible monsters summoned by a staff, which they learn was sold by Kaja Stewart, a researcher who had worked for Macbannin. The staff is ancient, and the monsters are unlike anything known by scholarship, but a bit of digging leads the party to an archaeologist named Xambria Meredith.

Xambria recently returned from a disastrous expedition in Risur’s High Bayou, excavating an Ancient ziggurat. Some disaster killed the rest of her team and left Xambria mentally unhinged, but she confirms the staff was found at the ziggurat. After finding it, she sent it to her sponsor, a tiefling named Caius Bergeron. Bergeron refuses to talk to the party and has enough clout to get out of trouble, so to follow the only remaining lead, the PCs must head to the High Bayou and see what killed Xambria’s team.

The PCs explore the ziggurat, fight more alien monsters, and learn that the ziggurat contains a portal to the plane Apet which was sealed by the Ancients to stop an invasion by beings known as the Gidim. As they leave the ziggurat, the PCs are confronted by the fey titan known as the Voice of Rot, who demands they track down an escaped Gidim. It grants them the ability to track the planar energy of Apet that marks the creature’s trail; the trail leads back to Flint, where the PCs find Caius murdered and Xambria missing.

A note arrives for the party from Xambria, claiming that the Gidim is controlling her mind, and that it’s asking about the “Obscurati.” The party is able to track her down and capture her, and she says that the creature killed Caius and learned things from him, including that Saxby is part of the conspiracy. But when the party confronts Saxby at the RHC headquarters, the Gidim emerges from Xambria’s body and enacts its plan.

The Gidim opens a portal to Apet, flooding RHC headquarters with strange energies and more monsters, hoping to eliminate any evidence of its presence. It intends to return to its homeworld and bring back a new invasion force, but its portal becomes unstable, unleashing a massive monster that the party must defeat if they want to close the portal and save the RHC from being drawn into a maddened cyst of reality.



ARCHAEOLOGY AND DANGER JOIN FORCES.



### Adventure Four: *Always on Time.*

Author Jacob Driscoll • *Ride a train full of ne'er-do-wells, and stop a powerful invention from falling into enemy hands.*

Date: Winter of 501 A.O.V. • Party Level: 8.

Clues from Caius's correspondence tell the party that a gathering of high-ranking Obscurati members will await the arrival of a train in Crisillyir on the 16th of Winter. Tracing the train's schedule backwards, the party adopts cover identities and boards at its westernmost stop, hoping to figure out whom the Obscurati are meeting and what they're up to. The train follows a scenic coastal route, so they have a ship shadow them, ready to reinforce them or aid their escape at the end of the mission.

The person of greatest interest is a tiefling Luc Jierre – brother of Lya and inventor of the *wayfarer's lantern*. But Luc is guarded several bodyguards all traveling incognito, and the party has only a few days to pick them out of crowd of other suspicious characters. As the train travels from Danor, through the Malice Lands, into Drakr, to a city-state run by mages, and finally into Crisillyir, each side spies against the other, looking for clues and opportunities to remove their enemies.

Among the crowd of strangers: a stowaway with connections to Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen, a wealthy matchmaker taking an

eladrin woman to be sold into slavery, a family of “new money” half-orcs from Ber taking in the sights, a war vet who might have crossed paths with a PC in the past, a suave gunslinger, a gambler on the run, and a railroad guard who's set the train up for a robbery. Some of the innocent travelers fall into danger, and the party has to decide whether helping them is worth risking their cover being blown.

Eventually Obscurati diviners warn Luc of the party, and at the train's next stop one of his bodyguards uses illusions to trick the party into chasing them onto a cursed island, where the Clergy keeps heretical and unholy items locked up. If they fall for the trick they are trapped, but can earn the aid of Ashima-Shimtu, a demon who has been trapped for centuries. Though she cannot escape herself, she can help the party finish their mission.

At the end of the line, the party can witness Luc being invited to join the conspiracy by his sister, proving that Lya Jierre is a threat to Risur. With a narrow window to act, the party can sweep in and try to steal the lantern and possibly capture or kill Luc and Lya. But their arrival brings down a huge retaliation, for the party is on the Obscurati's home turf, and they'll likely have to ride the train off a half-finished bridge over the harbor in order to reach their ship and escape to safety.



A TRAIN ON THE AVERY COAST RAILROAD STEAMS TOWARD DESTINY.



### ***Adventure Five: Cauldron-Born.***

**Author** Thurston Hillman • *As dignitaries arrive for a peace summit, the party is tasked with bringing down the Kell Guild and revealing the conspiracy's operations in the Bleak Gate.*

**Date:** Spring of 501 A.O.V. • **Party Level:** 9–10.

Though King Aodhan now knows Lya Jierre is part of the conspiracy, he still wants to avoid war, and so the planned peace summit will continue. But he hopes to unmask the conspiracy and negotiate from a position of power, so he tasks the party with entering the Bleak Gate and attacking whatever facility the Obscurati have that. To do that, they will head up a task force of police officers to destroy the Kell Guild and capture its leader. His people smuggled goods into the Bleak Gate, and he can help the party get there too.

Two complications force the party to split their attentions. First, a lord of the Unseen Court, Ekossigan of Spring, gathers fey from the across the city to perform a vile ritual and march an army into the Bleak Gate, which might actually help the party if not for the arrival of Asrabey Varal, who claims that the Court demands Ekossigan be stopped.

Second, a faction of radical dwarven eschatologists launch terror attacks around the city. They hope to disrupt the peace summit, and while they're not affiliated with the Obscurati, they have to be stopped before they kill hundreds of people, including the king.

Eventually the party heads into the Bleak Gate, guided by Alexander Grappa – the mindmaker – who helped create the colossus but now wants to take down the conspiracy. After fighting their way into the colossus construction facility, the party confronts Leone Quital, but in the battle the colossus breaks free and begins to rampage. It tears a hole through the side of Cauldron Hill and emerges into the real world, threatening to devastate Flint.

To stop the destruction, the party they must lure the colossus to the sea, then get close enough and survive its attacks while King Aodhan invokes his royal power to banish the colossus to the Dreaming. It's only a temporary solution, and by the time they're done many of the Obscurati have made good their escape, but the PCs have protected Risur, and thwarted – for now – the conspiracy's plan.



### **Act Two: The Grand Design.**

The PCs disrupt a conspiracy's plot to alter reality so they can ascend to power.

### ***Adventure Six: Revelations from the Mouth of a Madman.***

**Author** Ryan Nock • *Travel to a nation in turmoil to track down the tinker who built the colossus.*

**Date:** Summer of 501 A.O.V. • **Party Level:** 11–12.

The party heads to Ber, following a lead on Tinker Oddcog. Oddcog, the gearbuilder, designed the colossus and could tell Risur how to defeat it – or control it. But the Obscurati are looking for Tinker too, hoping to silence him. Led by Lya Jierre, the Ob have befriended the ruler of Ber, Bruse Shantus, who has extended his supernatural protection over the gnome. Tinker is useful for Ber's industrial growth, and the Bruse will only give him up if he's properly entertained.

The Bruse forbids the party from harming Lya's group and vice versa, then gives them both a sort of competition. Two companies are rushing to finish Ber's first cross-country railroad; the Bruse gives the party one company and Lya the other, with points awarded to whichever side finishes its length of track first. Sabotage is encouraged.

Also, the Bruse has a politically powerful rival, and he either wants him to pledge loyalty or be embarrassed. To embarrass him, the Bruse wants Lya to convince one of his hot-headed naval captains to launch a raid on a Risuri fort. The party has to find a way to convince a stubborn old orc warlord to pledge fealty before Risuri territory is attacked.

After getting his entertainment, the Bruse announces a winner and delivers Tinker to whichever team he liked best. But Tinker reveals himself to be a construct controlled remotely, with a bomb in his chest. It turns out that the whole time, Tinker was actually working for Benedict Pemberton, an industrialist from Risur who was once the dragon tryant Gradiax the Steel Lord. The party has to save the Bruse from Gradiax's coup attempt, then possibly ally with Lya to reach Tinker on a heavily-guarded island controlled by Pemberton.

After fighting their way into Tinker's volcano lair/factory, the PCs are attacked simultaneously by Lya's team and by Tinker, or rather by his mechanical duplicant (who is piloting a steam-powered mecha suit), under control of Pemberton. Pemberton himself is only present in duplicant form as well, and if his plans are thwarted he vows to have his revenge on the party.





### Adventure Seven: Schism.

**Author** Ryan Nock • *Infiltrate the most important gathering of the Obscurati and learn their master plan.*

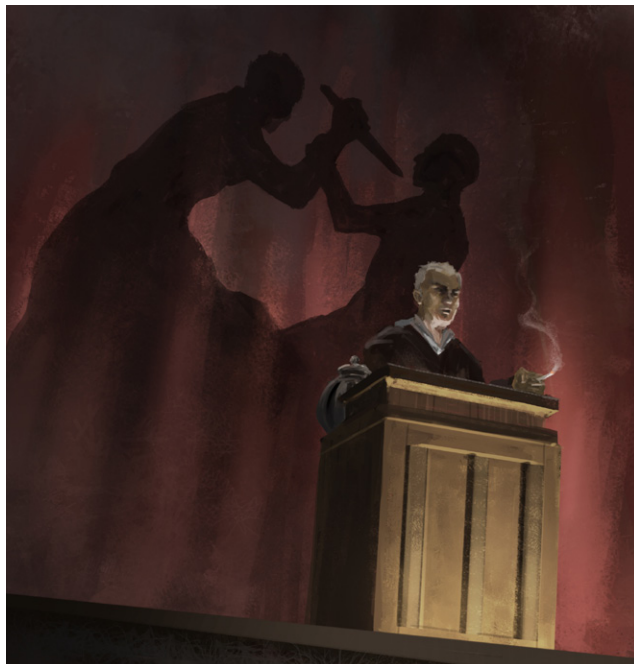
**Date:** Autumn of 501 A.O.V. • **Party Level:** 13.

The party receives a request from Alexander Grappa, who offers to get them into an Obscurati convocation if they can free him. With the aid of kobold spies from Ber the party locates Grappa, whose consciousness is trapped inside Leone Quital after Grappa perished in Adventure Five. After capturing Quital the party takes him to a remote glacial rift controlled by frost giants, where Grappa can use forbidden magic to destroy Quital's soul and take control of the body himself.

The same magic will let the party take control of the bodies of Obscurati cell leaders, who were meeting with Leone to travel to the convocation. Carrying their original bodies in an extradimensional space the party goes in deep undercover to the island of Mutravir, seat of power of the conspiracy. There they are greeted by Nicodemus the Gnostic, and see the ghost of Reed Macbannin, who recently joined the Ghost Council.

Over two days the party learns the entire plan of the conspiracy, but they notice there are cracks forming within it. When Nicodemus calls a vote to decide just how to shape the coming world, the conspiracy splits into two sides. The party can cast deciding votes, but it matters little because Nicodemus uses replicas of the *wayfarer's lantern* to mollify those who disagree with him. He intends to kill the PCs, so that only those with the proper mix of idealism and pragmatism will continue with the conspiracy.

That's when Benedict Pemberton, who also managed to infiltrate the convocation by replacing a conspirator with a duplicant, thanks Nicodemus for revealing the whole plot, then sets off a bomb. This frees the opposing faction from the magic holding them and kicks off a chaotic battle between the two sides, with the party caught in the middle.



### Adventure Eight: Diaspora.

**Author** Thurston Hillman • *Guide an amnesiac member of the conspiracy to retrace her history and the history of the fall of the eladrin people.*

**Date:** Winter of 501 A.O.V. • **Party Level:** 14-15.

The party has found the colossus' three fathers – Tinker Oddcog the gearbuilder, Leone Quital the steelshaper, and Alexander Grappa the mindmaker. Now they seek its mother, Kasvarina Varal, whom the colossus bonded with while it was being trained. But more than a year earlier, when Grappa betrayed the conspiracy, he locked away the memories of both colossus and Kasvarina.

The party finds Kasvarina in Elfaivar, protected by Asrabey and other powerful eladrin. Her memory is in tatters, but the eladrin know of an artifact that can manifest the past in the presence of one who lived it. The *Lost Arc of Reida* lies in a perilous ruin, but if the party recovers it they can take Kasvarina on a journey to relive her history.

Whenever they reach a place with a prominent memory, the silver relic psychically manifests a recreation of the past. Some are benign but informative. Others bring back to life long-dead foes which must be slain to restore the next piece of Kasvarina's life. The trail leads them to her first meeting with Nicodemus, and eventually to the cursed vault where they spoke with the demon Ashima-Shimtu.

Enemies pursue the party as well, and as they get closer to the most pivotal memory in the abandoned city of Methia, whole armies threaten to surround them. But Methia lies in a region of near total antimagic, so much so that the colossus, which despite being trapped in the Dreaming has been intuitively following Kasvarina's journey, is able to step into the real world.

As battalions pursue them, the party races to reach the former center of the Clergy, where Kasvarina and Nicodemus were responsible for the Great Malice. The relic is able to manifest a past when magic was possible here, giving the party a chance to fend off the oncoming armies. Depending on how the party has interacted with Kasvarina, she might decide that her original decisions were wrong and side with the party, but more likely she realizes she chose right all along.

Kasvarina's memories reveal the Obscurati plan is too widespread and close to completion for the party to stop entirely, but they have a chance to keep their homeland Risur from falling under Ob control. Ob forces attack, but when the vision of the past flickers out and the ritual that caused the Great Malice is completed, the party is blasted away into another world. They know now how to save Risur, but the conspiracy is able to regain control of the colossus.





### ***Adventure Nine: The Last Starry Sky.***

**Author** Ryan Nock • *Choose sides in a fey civil war so you can escape the Dreaming, save the king, and stop a ritual from turning all of Risur loyal to the Obscurati.*

**Date:** Spring of 502 A.O.V. • **Party Level:** 16-17.

The party ends up stuck in the Dreaming, and learn that the Unseen Court is at war with itself. To get back to the real world the party will have to pick a side and get the aid of one of the fey titans, which exist in both worlds. They reach the capital of Risur while it is under siege, but learn that King Aodhan has been captured and is being held in Flint.

Rushing to Flint they discover magic is fluctuating, as if some great change is passing over the world. They fight their way past a naval blockade of the governor's island and find Roland Stanfield, head of the Obscurati's Colossus Cell, at the controls of an eldritch machine. As stars rain from the heavens the party has to stop a ritual before all of Risur falls under the Ob's control. But the king is likely mortally wounded, and he passes his crown to the most worthy among the party.

### **Act Three: Age of Reason.**

The PCs battle the conspiracy's new world order, and must set the course of the future.

### ***Adventure Ten: Godmind.***

**Author** Thurston Hillman

*Find allies who can still resist the Obscurati, and hatch a plan to set the world right.*

**Date:** n/a

**Party Level:** 18.

Something went wrong during the Obscurati ritual, and though people obey the Ob's ideology, the Axis Seal remains open. The world has been lost at the edge of the cosmos, endless night has fallen, and invaders have once again set their sights on invading this land.

At best, Risur is resisting the Obscurati, but every thought is a struggle. The rest of civilization is wholly loyal, except for a few pockets of strong-willed individuals, many of whom would make critical allies for the fight to retake the world. The tables have turned, and now the PCs are the conspiracy hiding in the shadows in an attempt to change reality.



BEWARE THE DREAMING.



### Adventure Eleven: Gorged on Ruins.

Author Liz Courts

Seek the lore needed to undo the Obscurati ritual while cataclysms around the world threaten to destroy civilization.

Date: n/a

Party Level: 19.

Along with the dangers the PCs find themselves in in Adventure Ten, other threats endanger all civilization. The fey titans wreak destruction upon inhabited lands in Risur and must be subdued. Armies of the dead are led by doomsday cultists in Drakr. Infernal legions march through the Dreaming and the Gidim invade from a foothold in Ber.

As the PCs stave off these threats, they earn praise and loyalty from several regions around the world. But the most imperiled nation is where they must go to find critical information to defeat the Obscurati. The party heads to the grand library of Alais Primos, capital of Crisillyir and seat of the Clergy, but their research is interrupted when the newly enlightened and rational populace of the city takes it upon themselves to conjure avatars of their gods and place them on trial. When the citizens of Alais Primos execute a god they deem unfit, a nearby mountain erupts in lava, unleashing an unholy dragon that could consume the city and incinerate the books that contain the knowledge that could save the world.



### Adventure Twelve: The Grinding Gears of Heaven.

Author Ryan Nock • Travel to the graveyard of the multiverse to find safe planes to bond this world to and set a better fate for it.

Date: n/a

Party Level: 20.

Though the PCs and their allies have the information they need to undo the ritual of the Axis Seal, they need to find worlds it would be safe to bond to. They set out across the multiverse to the Gyre, a planar graveyard for worlds that are dying or abandoned. There they encounter ghosts from history, and discover that the fey titan known as the Voice of Rot has prepared for this moment and seeks to use the world's destruction to fuel its own ascension to godhood.

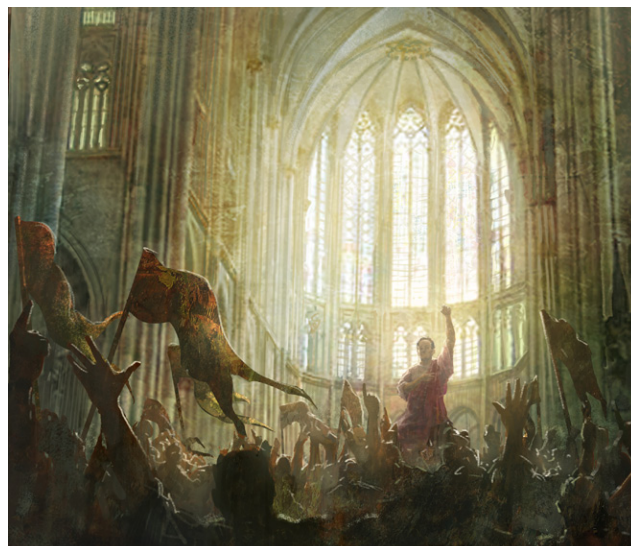


### Adventure Thirteen: Avatar of Revolution.

Author Ryan Nock • Empowered by the worldwide uprising against the Obscurati, stand against Nicodemus and his colossus in one final battle of ideas.

Date: n/a • Party Level: 20.

Returning home, the party rallies people from across the world and becomes the focus of a ritual that makes them the avatars of civilization's will so they can confront the last of the Obscurati and secure the next age.





## Recurring Antagonists.

In role-playing games, nearly every enemy ultimately faces off against the PCs and loses. It might help to know which Obscurati members the party will face when. Occasionally the party may thwart a villain's plot, yet fail to capture the villain, leading to a rematch later. If, on the contrary, the PCs defeat one of these NPCs prematurely, you'll need either to invent someone to take their place, or "promote" another member of the conspiracy, which might have complex ramifications.

**Lya Jierre.** Head of Golden Cell (starting Adventure One). Though she antagonizes the PCs in Adventure One, they won't cross blades until Adventure Four. She has a magical contingency to flee to the Bleak Gate when bloodied, but the party can finish her off when she confronts them again in Adventure Six.

**Roland Stanfield.** Head of Colossus Cell. Stanfield keeps his involvement with the conspiracy hidden until Adventure Nine, but if he's unmasked or even slain prematurely, he can reincarnate and return to be the climactic villain in Adventure Nine.

**Vicemi Terio.** Head of Lantern Cell. The spectral Terio doesn't appear until Adventure Seven; when he does, he'll probably be slain by the PCs.

**Han Jierre.** The party first meets the sovereign of Danor at a peace conference in Adventure Five, and might spot him again in Adventure Seven. After the Obscurati open the Axis Seal, Han infuses himself and several trusted lieutenants with the spirits of the Ghost Council, making them a match for high-level PCs.

**Kasvarina Varal.** In Adventure Eight, the PCs have a chance to win

Kasvarina's loyalty. If they succeed, her betrayal incenses Nicodemus. If they fail, she helps Nicodemus kill them. It will take great effort from the PCs to recruit her, but she could be a mighty ally.

**Nicodemus the Gnostic.** The head of the Obscurati first meets the party in Adventure Two, disguised as a seemingly inconsequential visitor to Reed Macbannin's estate. They may briefly speak with him in Adventure Four, though he's only present via *needlewire* and thus incapable of fighting them. He first introduces himself properly in Adventure Seven, by which point he has chosen a long-term body for himself. They have a chance to defeat him temporarily in Adventure Eight, and can finally destroy his spirit form in Adventure Thirteen. Nicodemus maintains a five centuries-old smoking habit, regardless of whose body he's in.

**The Colossus.** Named "Borne" by one of its creators, the colossus's memory is stolen by Alexander Grappa the Mindmaker during Adventure Two, delaying the conspiracy's plans as they try to restore it. In Adventure Five, Grappa helps the party enter Borne's construction bay, and he frees the colossus, which wanders and accidentally causes destruction. After driving the golem off, the PCs don't cross paths with it again until Adventure Eight, when they may make a doomed attempt to gain control of it. "Off-screen" events of Adventure Nine leave it critically damaged on Axis Island. In Adventure Thirteen, however, the party will compete with the Obscurati to reactivate and control this mechanical titan.

## Abridged Conspiracy

Not all groups have the time or stamina for a full 20-level campaign.

### Act One Only.

If you only run the campaign through Adventure Five, you have to strip away much of the greater conspiracy in order to simplify things. The villain becomes Lya Jierre who, with the aid of Flint city governor Reed Macbannin and Lorcan Kell, is constructing a colossus so she can defeat the fey titans of Risur. Her goal is to claim the throne of Risur, then use the colossus to expand the power of Danor. The activities of Golden Cell and Lantern Cell simply become tests to let the colossus travel and fight in the Dreaming and the Bleak Gate.

### Acts One and Two.

If you only run the campaign through Adventure Nine, the great seal that the Obscurati want to open is on an island in Flint Harbor, with Axis Island just having been a testing ground. At the climax, Nicodemus the Gnostic repeats the ritual that led to the Great Malice to place his spirit into the colossus, which is invincible until it opens the seal. But the unleashed energy would weaken Nicodemus, and the altered planar energy would restore Benedict Pemberton's ability to fly as a dragon. Though hostile to the party, he realizes the Obscurati are a greater threat, and so lets them climb aboard his back and battle Nicodemus and the colossus.

When the PCs defeat Nicodemus, the ritual's backlash kills everyone who is part of the Obscurati, and the party has a chance to slightly alter the nature of reality before the Axis Seal closes itself for good.

### The Middle.

If you prefer to start the campaign later, a series that runs from the peace summit in Adventure Five to the opening of the seal in Adventure Nine (with the changes detailed above) lets the players start as powerful heroes and have some international super-spy adventures. The challenge mostly involve filling in the PCs with a bit of extra backstory, and adjusting scenes where the PCs are expected to recognize NPCs from earlier adventures (for example, half-orc railroad owner Damata Griento in Adventure Six and the ghost of Mayor Reed Macbannin in Adventure Seven).

### Acts Two and Three.

Like above, this works best if you start with Adventure Five. The lack of set-up with Axis Island from Adventure One makes the climax a little less satisfying, and the Gidim's return in Adventure Eleven will seem like just a random alien invasion.

You might even try just running Act Three; the party would be lacking a lot of backstory and connection to the villains. Perhaps it could work with the PCs as leaders of countries that have unexpectedly fallen under the control of the Obscurati, but you'll have to do a fair bit of work for things to make sense to the players.





# Ancient History

**T**O HELP YOU KEEP DETAILS OF THE WORLD'S HISTORY straight in your head, we present this section that compiles information doled out bit by bit to players over the course of several adventures.

## The Ancients.

Thousands of years before Risur was founded, a civilization of primitive orcs fought against the numerous otherworldly forces trying to claim this plane as their territory. Since this civilization had no writing system, the adventurers and archaeologists who explore the few scattered ruins they left behind have dubbed them simply the Ancients.

A handful of heroes among these stone-age orcs nevertheless managed to understand, at least in general terms, the nature of the multiverse and how their enemies were invading this world. With that knowledge they were able to erect the Axis Seal and allow the mortal races to flourish, even though their own civilization did not survive.



## Fighting the Invaders.

There are countless planes in the cosmos, and portals can theoretically link any two worlds. From across the multiverse came savage demons, titanic dragons, the angels of numerous gods, and many more, all trying to claim their own territory. But two main invasion forces had the greatest claim: the psychic and semi-humanoid Gidim, who consume the thoughts of whole planes to feed their sentient homeworld; and the Golden Legion of Egal the Shimmering, a lord of hell clad in treasure and able to wield his enemies' pride and vanity like blades.

The Ancients discovered a ritual to seal a portal and create a permanent dimensional lock in a wide area. Whenever they found one of the portals the invaders were using, they would stage desperate raids to seal those doors, then build enchanted ziggurats laden with traps over the closed pathways.

In an infinite multiverse, these seals were only temporary solutions. Clever foes would always find a new route to a world with precious resources. But what this slow and methodical tactic accomplished was to create tiny safe havens: buffer worlds from which the Ancients knew no further threats could come.

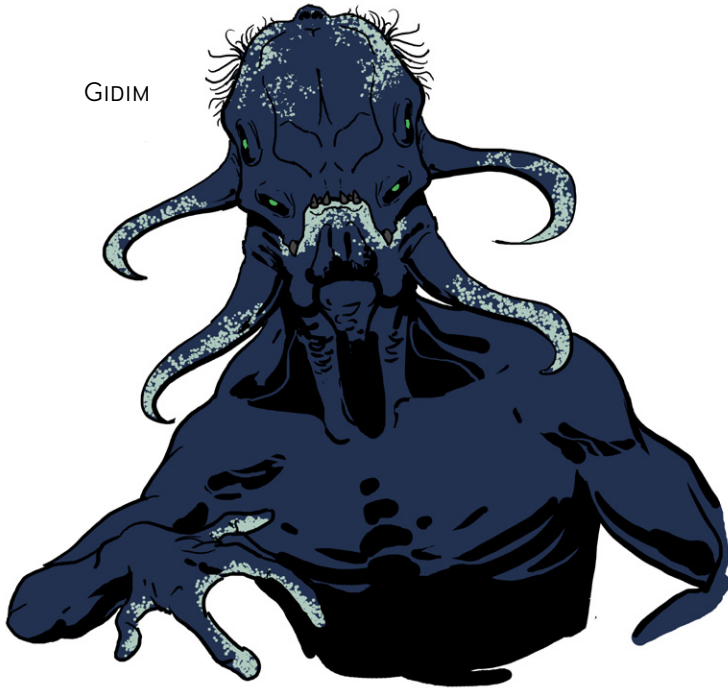
The architect of the Axis Seal, a wise orc whose name has been lost to time, intended to cut off his own world altogether, slicing it free from the rest of the multiverse. He knew, though, that a world completely cut off could not sustain itself. His world—any world—would continue to need the energies of other planes to allow life to flourish and magic to endure.



SOME BURIED RUINS ARE BEST LEFT FORGOTTEN.



GIDIM



### The Axis Seal.

The Ancients sealed as many of the invaders' portals as possible, and found worlds among those sealed that would provide the necessary energies: elemental air, earth, fire, and water, as well as the more esoteric energies of life, death, space, and time. When the time was right, the greatest heroes of the Ancients gathered in the heart of their territory and performed the Ritual of the Axis Seal. Simultaneously, eight other buffer worlds were linked to this one, and all of them were pulled across the multiverse, creating a system of planets.

Some of the worlds that provided the required energies were chosen specifically; others were chosen simply because they were available and convenient. For example, Urim, once just a slice of the greater Plane of Earth, provides the world's necessary earth magics. It also has a trait that makes teleportation impossible for those bounded in gold, making it a clever defense against any possible later invasions by the Golden Legion. By contrast, Avilona, the plane of air, has fairly weak energy but it was the only air plane the Ancients could secure.

The power of the ritual cracked the surface of the world, flooding huge areas and creating what is today the Yerasol Archipelago. The great flood sent the Ancient civilization into disarray, leaving them too weak to defend against misfortune.

### Fatal Flaw.

The Ancients made one great mistake. The cunning Gidim had realized what the orcs were planning and hid an invasion force on the world of Apet—the plane of space—which the Ancients thought abandoned. Once the Axis Seal was in effect and they had no competition from other planes, the Gidim struck.

The Ancients fought back, and they managed a hurried revision to the Axis Seal ritual, which turned Apet into a prison plane. While the massive world still orbits the sun and shares its mystical energies, it

cannot be reached by any magic. The Gidim were ultimately defeated, but their strike devastated the vulnerable Ancient culture. With their heroes dead and their people separated by flooded rifts, the mortal races fell back to nomadic tribalism for millennia.

### Legacy.

All that remains of the Ancients today are scattered, inexplicable ruins, many containing gold weapons looted from Egal's Golden Legion. (This greatly confounds archaeologists, who can find no evidence of the extensive Ancient mining necessary to have produced so much gold.)

In recent years agents of the Obscurati have funded expeditions to plumb the secrets of the ziggurats, which are scattered across Lanjyr. Priceless gold artifacts are less useful to them than the clues of how these primitive people connected to other worlds. Only the conspiracy has a sense of what the Ancients accomplished untold millennia ago.

The Ancients and their ruins come to the party's attention in Adventure Three, *Digging for Lies*, but then do not play a significant role again until Adventure Twelve, *The Grinding Gears of Heaven*.

The party only ever is expected to explore the ziggurats of Apet, Mavisha, and Avilona. Feel free to use the others however you wish. Each could contain traps and monsters themed to the appropriate plane, with some clue to the location of another ziggurat in the set, and a central chamber that has the seal over the portal. These portals, if opened with the proper ritual, would be one of the few ways to travel to another plane for more than five minutes.

For your reference, the locations of the Ancient ziggurats are:

- ◆ **Ziggurat of Apet.** The portal to the plane of space is guarded by this ruin in Risur's high bayou. Its discovery sets off events in Adventure Three.
- ◆ **Ziggurat of Av.** The portal to the plane of dreams lies in the big thicket in eastern Risur.
- ◆ **Ziggurat of Avilona.** The plane of air's ziggurat sits atop a floating island in a perpetual storm off the south coast of Ber.
- ◆ **Ziggurat of Jiese.** The ziggurat of the plane of fire lies in the desert in eastern Crisillyir.
- ◆ **Ziggurat of Mavisha.** The plane of water's ziggurat sank underwater just off of Ber's east coast.
- ◆ **Ziggurat of Nem.** The portal to the plane of ruin lies near the abandoned city of Methia in Danor.
- ◆ **Ziggurat of Reida.** The plane of time was never actually used as a staging point for an invasion, and thus never had to be sealed or have a ziggurat built for it. That said, almost no one knows this plane exists.
- ◆ **Ziggurat of Urim.** This ruin was long ago discovered by mages, who used the power seeping through it to establish the independent city of Nalaam in the Penance Peaks.
- ◆ **Axis Seal.** The final ritual site entails a one-hundred foot diameter plate of gold over eight pits filled with petrified white trees that form the metaphysical links to the other planes. Additional trees were placed elsewhere on the island to lock in the connection. Unfortunately the small tree for Avilona was unwittingly placed into a sea cave, and after centuries of erosion it broke, making magical flight nearly impossible. ☹️



A SPECTER OF FATE LOOMS OVER THE CITY OF FLINT.