



A Fantasy  
Role-Playing  
Adventure by  
**EN PUBLISHING**  
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Hampshire  
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EN Publishing is  
an imprint of  
EN World.  
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*When a murder investigation reveals evidence of a sprawling conspiracy, the party must protect a prophet who predicts a looming doomsday for the city of Flint.*

**Special Thanks to** Gabi, for teaching me about faeries.  
And you know who, for teaching me about crazy,  
soul-devouring banshees.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Wherein Solving a Murder Averts Doomsday.

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

In *The Dying Skyseer*, as the party investigates a murder they will cross paths with enemies they can recruit as temporary allies, and work with supposed friends who seek to mislead and betray them. This is a complex world, and it will take canny and dogged investigators to sift truth from amid layers of deception.

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

Before you run this adventure you'll want to be familiar with the Synopsis and the NPC Roster. Additionally, we've provided a Dramatis Personae handout, which you can give to the players at the start of the adventure. This presents illustrations and brief descriptions of NPCs the party would already know about at the start of the adventure. We intend to include updated versions of the Dramatis Personae with each adventure, to provide the players an easy visual reminder of whom they've met. You'll need to update this list based on your players' actions, or if you make changes of your own to the NPCs.

One benefit of releasing adventures in digital format is how easy it is to search the text. We do our best to make information easy to find, but if the PCs suddenly start suspecting Barb and you have no idea who that is, a quick search can turn up the information. (Barb's completely innocent, by the way.)

## BACKGROUND

For the past few months, tiny tremors have shaken the city of Flint, which has no history of earthquakes. Docker poets take it as a manifested metaphor of the rifts opening up between the different districts and cultures. Angry protests march through Bosum Strand and Parity Lake to denounce cruel treatment of factory workers, and the police thrash those who make too big a name for themselves.

While these divisions concern the common people of Flint, three more powerful forces are at work in the city during this adventure.

### Gale and the Fey Terrorists.

The rise of industry in Flint has faced opposition from many sources, most prominent among them being **Hana Soliogn**, dubbed "Gale" by the newspapers for her singular ability to fly away from the scenes of her crimes, despite most scholars saying such flight magic is impossible.

## ADAPTING THE ADVENTURE.

All the beginning ZEITGEIST adventures assume the PCs are agents of the Royal Homeland Constabulary. If your players are free agents, they might be brought in as specialist investigators due to the tricky political nature of a murder at the Danoran consulate. Alternately, a PC with the Docker or Vekeshi Mystic theme feat might have known Nilasa and so have a personal reason to solve the mystery.

If you're using this adventure in a different setting and want to strip out the technological elements, you need to keep a similar element of simmering social unrest. You might replace factories with more old-fashioned sweatshops making goods for a group of distrusted foreigners; perhaps the workers blame some mysterious disease on those foreigners.

The mystery generally remains the same, with the emphasis on tracking down people who have clues to secrets hidden in the Bleak Gate (or, more traditionally, the Plane of Shadow), while another group tries to stop the investigation. You'll need a reason for Reed Macbannin to be refining witchoil, particularly if you're not planning to run the later adventures.

Gale's attacks usually take the form of sneaking into factories at night and sabotaging machines so work must stop, or unmooring ships so they drift into the harbor and sink, and for these she has won the sympathies of those who view industry as Danoran meddling. But many common workers see her as a threat to their livelihood, and the government has labeled her a foreign provocateur with ties to the Vekeshi Mystics. She is also blamed for thefts from the homes of wealthy factory owners, for the killings of a company of surveyors who wandered into the Cloudwood to site a potential railroad, and for a botched assassination attempt against Kane Westman, a tax collector with strong political friends.

Gale wants to garner more support with the common people. She recognizes that blindly attacking factories makes her look like a villain. In the weeks leading up to this adventure, one of Gale's loyalists, a half-elf woman named **Nilasa Hume**, gained the trust of a security guard at the Danoran consulate in Flint. Gale had tasked Nilasa with retrieving financial documents and political letters from the consulate in order to get a better sense of whom to target for future attacks. Nilasa's mission gets her killed just as the adventure begins.

## The Family.

The Family criminal organization is based in Crisillyir, and sees the growth of Flint as a great opportunity to expand into a new market. For the past year they've been competing with the various local gangs, with many daring battles led by veteran bravura **Morgan Cippiano**, the face of the organization in Flint.

The Family tries to focus its violence only against other criminals, and targets its crimes against wealthy factory owners and merchants, rather than everyday people. They seek to convince townsfolk from relaxed Stray River to the gritty streets of Parity Lake that the Family will protect them better than the police can. Of course, they're working to get the police in their pockets too.

## GALE AND THE VEKESHI

The secretive cult of the Vekeshi Mystics has been trying to recruit Gale, since she and the Vekeshi have common enemies, and her flight would make her an ideal assassin.

Before the adventure starts, inform any PC with the Vekeshi Mystic theme feat that she has been given a mission. The latest gathering of adherents occurred on the last full moon before the solstice, when a representative of the Unseen Court opened a path into the Dreaming and offered everyone drink, dance, and love-making with beautiful fey.

Before the celebration, one of the more experienced members of the Flint cell—he always wears a mask, but has distinctive hands, marked with scars and calluses—took the PC aside and said it would be her task to protect Gale. While the RHC is tasked with capturing the fey terrorist, the Vekeshi want the PC to deliver a gift, and a message.

The gift is a bizarre mirror. It resembles a wreath of gnarled wood, and instead of a pane of glass, a sheet of water hangs within, no matter what angle you hold it at. It is magical, but its purpose is unclear. Normally it is just a beautiful mirror.

That message is: "The Unseen Court is watching. Take this mirror, and when you see the face of our enemies within it, bring them down and we shall reward you."

The party will have a chance to meet Gale, and this delivery can be the first step of many throughout the campaign that draws the PCs toward the Unseen Court.

## KANE WESTMAN

If the PCs check out Mr. Westman, he's clean. Gale attacked him because she detected energies from the Bleak Gate around his home, but he wasn't the source. In truth, Cillian Creed, Macbannin's aide, had been coordinating with Westman to ensure certain smuggled items disappeared from tax logs, but Westman assumed it was everyday bribery, and he has no idea about the operations on Cauldron Hill.

While most native criminals handle petty theft or crude protection rackets, the Family pursues high-end burglary, smuggling, and black-mail. Facing bloody opposition, Morgan has cleverly tricked gangs into turf wars that weaken them so the Family can move in. They're having trouble unseating one power player, though: **Lorcan Kell**, who has become a fixture in the industrial smuggling scene.

Nilasa Hume has connections with both Gale and the Family, and she has arranged for Gale and her allies to purchase a huge cache of smuggled magic items that Family thieves stole from Crisillyir.

## The Obscurati.

As detailed in the Campaign Guide, the Colossus Cell of the Obscurati are constructing a massive golem inside Cauldron Hill, or rather the ~~access~~ **gate** to Cauldron Hill that exists in the shadowy plane called the Bleak Gate.

This massive undertaking is secretly overseen by the city governor, **Roland Stanfield**, with the construction in the Bleak Gate directed by a steelshaper named **Leone Quital**. This adventure, however, focuses mostly on the involvement of **Reed Macbannin**, mayor of The Nettles, the city district where Cauldron Hill lies.

Macbannin spent years studying how to defend against dark magic, and he sincerely wants to protect Flint from whatever curses and evil energies were left behind by the witches of Cauldron Hill. He does not know about the existence of the Obscurati. Rather, he believes that Governor Stanfield is running a secret and morally-gray weapons research program for King Aodhan.

Macbannin has been told that the king expects an eventual war with the fey of the Dreaming—possibly even the awakening of the fey titans—as retaliation for his planned treaty with the Danorans. Hoping to cow the fey with technology, high-level officials in Risur and Danor are cooperating to construct a colossal golem. Of course common people would balk, and discovery by the fey would be disastrous, so secrecy is critical.

Macbannin coordinates the myriad elements that must work in the normal world to let Quital do his construction in the Bleak Gate. This includes working with crime boss Lorcan Kell to smuggle the necessary components into the Bleak Gate without raising any red flags, intimidating uncooperative factory owners to change their minds, and making sure investigations into mysterious happenings yield no results.

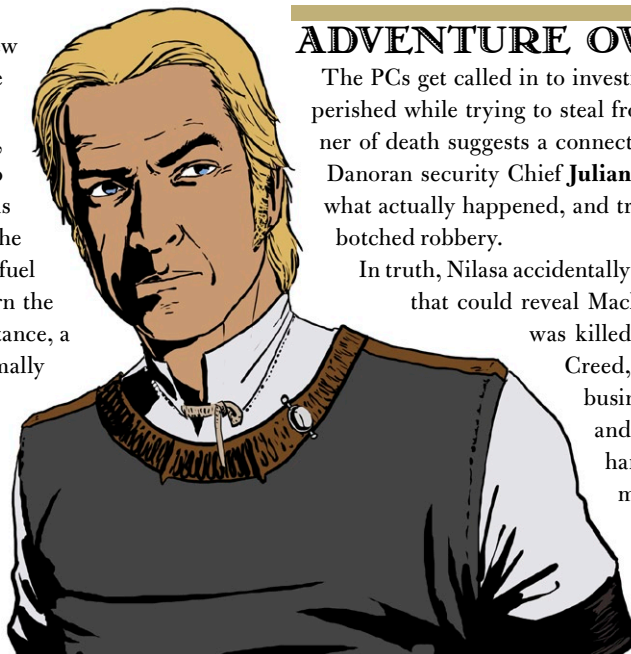
Macbannin carefully shields himself from direct involvement, typically sending messages through his butler **Cillian Creed**, a retired spy whose mastery of disguise conceals horrid physical corruption from a failed experiment involving energies of the Bleak Gate.

Of late, Macbannin has hired the services of a pair of lizardfolk arsonists from Ber, **Eberardo and Valando**. When a factory produces something Quital needs for his colossus but which the owner is unwilling to part with, he is likely to find his house aflame, or his business ignited. An outsider will offer to buy the factory while it burns, after which



firefighters rush to put out the blaze. These new owners—proxies of Lorcan Kell—are of course cooperative to Macbannin's interests.

While Quital constructs the metal titan, Macbannin is researching his own way to aid the defense of Risur. Since fey magic is not trusted, Macbannin is repurposing the dark magic of the Cauldron Hill witches to fuel the mighty golem. He has found a way to turn the energy of the Bleak Gate into a physical substance, a liquid called witchoil. When people die, normally their souls linger in the Bleak Gate for a time before passing on, but if a person dies near a vial of witchoil, their soul is trapped in the fluid instead of passing into the plane of the dead. When the oil is burned, the soul is consumed, making it a potent power source. Macbannin has arranged to stash witchoil vials throughout many factories, which are naturally prone to industrial accidents. Meanwhile he refines an ever larger supply of the substance in a secret facility hidden beneath his manor on Cauldron Hill. Macbannin doesn't believe a soul has much worth after death, and so has no qualms trapping and annihilating souls of the deceased to help the living.



*Cillian Creed, the Killer but Not the Villain.*

## ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The PCs get called in to investigate the death of Nilasa Hume, who perished while trying to steal from the Danoran consulate. Her manner of death suggests a connection to the fey terrorist Gale, but the Danoran security Chief **Julian LeBrix** is under orders to cover up what actually happened, and tries to make it look like just a normal botched robbery.

In truth, Nilasa accidentally stumbled upon a cache of documents that could reveal Macbannin's criminal activities, and she was killed by Mayor Macbannin's aid, Cillian Creed, who was at the consulate for other business. Unfortunately for Macbannin and Creed, just before Nilasa died she handed off the stolen documents to a man who fled the scene.

This man, **Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen**, has no connection to any of the major players in the adventure, and was just an innocent bystander who panicked and ran. Once he discovered what he'd been handed he hid in The Net-

tles, hoping to shake pursuit and arrange for passage out of the country.

The PCs set out to find the doctor and figure out what Nilasa was up to. By tracing Nilasa's connections they learn of a smuggling operation bringing in magic items to arm Gale's allies. Clues from various sources lead to a confrontation with wand smugglers in Flint's harbor. After a battle that fields barely-controlled magic wand blasts, the party captures a few Family toughs. Soon thereafter they are contacted by Morgan Cipriano, who offers to help the party out with their larger investigation in exchange for letting off his people.

Another thread of Nilasa's activities leads them to **Heward Sechim**, a man who runs a factory producing alchemical acid, and who was friends with Nilasa. Sechim, who despite owning a factory is opposed to Danoran presence in Risur, defends Nilasa as a good young woman.

Heward can get the party in touch with **Nevard Sechim**, Heward's sickly old uncle and a once-renowned skyseer. Nevard is highly respected by Gale, and if the party is willing to help him, he can get them a meeting with her. Nevard wants to climb above the smog cloaking the city to see the stars again; he hopes a vision will help soothe the unrest in the streets. But the only place to get a clear view within the city is the top of Cauldron Hill, said to be haunted and thus prohibited, except by permission of the mayor of The Nettles, Reed Macbannin.

When the party goes to Macbannin, he agrees to let Nevard up the mountain, and encourages them to go with him as defense against the evil spirits. In truth he hopes to arrange for their deaths and thus end their investigation; simultaneously he sends his lizardfolk arsonists to destroy Heward Sechim's factory so he won't be able to point any other constables this way. When the party survives Macbannin's ploy, Nevard receives several visions, one of which guides them to thwart the arson just in time. Macbannin, of course, pretends to be pleased they survived the dangers of the mountain, while secretly planning another way to thwart them.

Nevard arranges for Gale to meet with the PCs on safe ground. She claims they have a common enemy, and shares her hunches and limited knowledge of a secret group operating in the Bleak Gate, which she thinks has ties to the Danorans. If the party doesn't try to arrest her, she gives them a spell that will let them track the trace "scent" of a person who

## THE BLEAK GATE AND THE DREAMING.

These two planes are detailed in the *ZEITGEIST Player's Guide*. In brief, they have the same general geography as the real world, but with distinct inhabitants and magical energies. Traveling to them typically requires powerful magic, but sometimes pathways open between the worlds, through rings of toadstools or banks of rancid fog on moonless nights.

The Bleak Gate is where the spirits of the dead linger before passing on. Gloomy clouds block out both sun and stars, and it's almost impossible to keep track of time. There are no birds or insects, and most sounds echo dully, except for howls and moans of monsters and the dead, which carry for miles in the windless air.

A hundred and fifty-four years ago a coven of witches took residence upon Cauldron Hill, which rises high in the center of Flint. They hid in the veil between the real world and the Bleak Gate, learning to use the souls of the dead as fuel for their foul sorcery. After years of terrorizing the city, they were defeated by the king of Risur and his allies, but unnatural forces still haunt the peak of that ominous hill.

Today the Obscurati have carved a massive complex out of the stone of Cauldron Hill in the Bleak Gate. As the mountain shifts and settles, it sends occasional tremors through the city, rattling even into the real world. The construction complex is guarded with monsters and magic, but the PCs will have a chance to pierce its defenses in *Adventure Five, Cauldron-Born*.

The Dreaming is a tangle of verdant and teeming nature, home to faeries, boggards, trolls, and the Unseen Court. The land follows dream logic, and traveling requires a proper mindset more than a precise map. Though at first glance more pleasant and safe than the Bleak Gate, the Dreaming is home to capricious fey who delight in misleading and confusing people to their deaths.

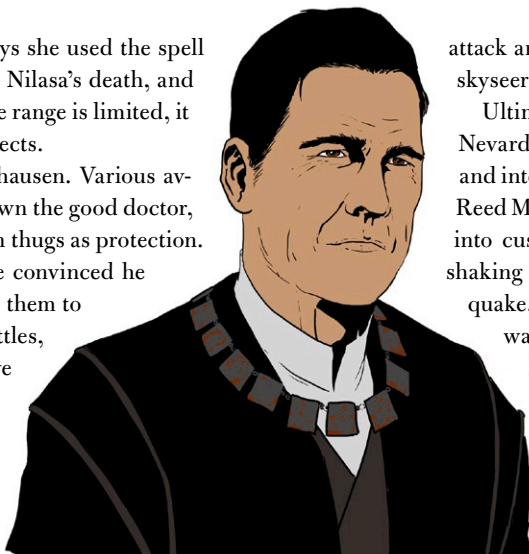
has traveled into the Bleak Gate. She says she used the spell at the Danoran consulate the night after Nilasa's death, and sensed traces of dark energy. Though the range is limited, it can point the party toward possible suspects.

The final thread is Dr. von Recklinghausen. Various avenues give the party a chance to track down the good doctor, who has hired some of Lorcan Kell's own thugs as protection. When the party finds him, he has to be convinced he can trust them, and he eventually points them to an abandoned Clergy church in The Nettles, where he hid the documents Nilasa gave him. The doctor says that he read the documents and found references to a substance he recognized as "witchoil." The documents, he says, were written by the Danoran security chief Julian LeBrix.

LeBrix reveals that months ago he was investigating strange goings-on in Danoran-funded factories. He thought they might have been caused by sabotage by Gale, but instead he stumbled upon strange vials of witchoil, stashed in dozens of factories. He wanted to find out what they were, but was told by his superiors to end his investigation. The party realizes that someone is using the deaths of factory workers as a way to gather energy for some nefarious purpose. LeBrix thinks that with the information he got as a starting point, it might be possible to figure out who's behind it.

When the party goes to recover the documents, though, Cillian Creed leads a strike team to kill the party, recover the material, and kidnap the doctor. Creed arranges a trap for the party, burying them alive, but clever thinking can save them.

With evidence of larger goings-on, but no clear idea of who is responsible, the party gets guidance from Nevard the skyseer, who says he will present his visions and interpretations of what they mean at a large rally. Dockers, factory workers, and thousands of townsfolk attend, making security nearly impossible, but the party gets clues in advance that the same group who killed Nilasa and tried to recover the documents will target Nevard. Magically-altered great cats, infused with shadow energy,



*Reed Macbannin, the Villain but Not the Killer.*

attack and create a panic, and it's up to the PCs to save the skyseer, or to listen to the revelations on his dying breaths.

Ultimately, with a combination of evidence and aid from Nevard, Gale, Morgan Cippiano, the documents Nilasa stole, and interrogating the arson brothers, the party is able to link Reed Macbannin to the whole plot. When they go to take him into custody, however, the strange tremors that have been shaking the city for weeks finally erupt into a massive earthquake, releasing huge torrents of witchoil that Macbannin was collecting and refining. As the mountain starts to break apart around them, the witchoil flood threatens the slums of The Nettles, forcing the PCs to decide what's more important—saving thousands of innocent lives, or capturing Macbannin.

## RUNNING AN INVESTIGATIVE ADVENTURE

A mystery is more complicated to run than a dungeon crawl, but after you've read through the adventure you should have a clear sense of which groups and individuals want what, and how their goals are interconnected. The PCs' initial mission should be to use Nilasa as a lead to track down Gale, but as they follow the clues it becomes clear that her actions are connected to something more dangerous than the fey terrorist.

### RHC Protocol.

To help structure the PCs' investigations, you might suggest the following pattern. Since there are no phones (and magical communication is rare and expensive), Risur Homeland Constabulary protocol for these sorts of cases encourages constables to start each day at the RHC office in Central district. Their personal office will probably have some sort of slate board marked with names of key figures, locations, and events, with arrows tracing their connections.

Each morning the group gets together at the office, files reports about the previous day, and makes plans for which leads they want to follow. If that entails splitting up, they can either meet up at the office the next morning, or set a meeting place and time, typically a district police station but possibly the home or business of one of the PCs' contacts.

Elements of the investigation are time-sensitive, while other events happen in response to the PCs finding the right clue or catching the attention of the wrong person. The adventure starts on the 1st day of summer, and you'll want to keep track of what day it is. If you want to keep track of time spent each day, consider that it typically takes an hour to travel from the center of one district to the center of an adjacent one if going by foot, or half an hour by carriage.

It's not a hard and fast rule that the party must return to the office each day, but bringing them back here gives them a clear sense of the passage of days, and reminds them that they have resources at their disposal. It also provides you a convenient time to hand out new information or messages; witnesses or requisitioned items can be waiting for the PCs at the RHC offices at the end of each working day.

Plus, their boss Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft reads their daily reports, so he has a record and can tell his higher ups what's going on. This can give you an excuse as the DM to have an NPC remind the PCs to follow up on a clue they may have neglected.

Finally, in Adventure Three, *Digging for Lies*, action occurs in the office, and it will have greater impact if the party is familiar with the place.

## COMBAT-HUNGRY PLAYERS?

The first ZEITGEIST adventure started with a bang (possibly which annihilated the party in an explosion of steamship parts). This adventure takes a slower pace, and players who are eager for combat might get impatient.

You might try adding a bit of random action early on, perhaps moving the Fog of War encounter (page 30) to the start of the adventure, as part of an unrelated case. When the party comes back to the RHC office they get news of the murder, and so the mystery begins.

Alternately, you could just fast-forward through some of the early investigations by planting a clear lead on Nilasa's body. Maybe give her a receipt for Danisca Waryeye's apothecary shop (page 18), and when the PCs show up they interrupt a drug deal, provoking immediate combat.

You know best what your players will enjoy, but give them a chance to get involved in the mystery. They might discover that they like challenging their investigative skills as much as challenging their combat build.