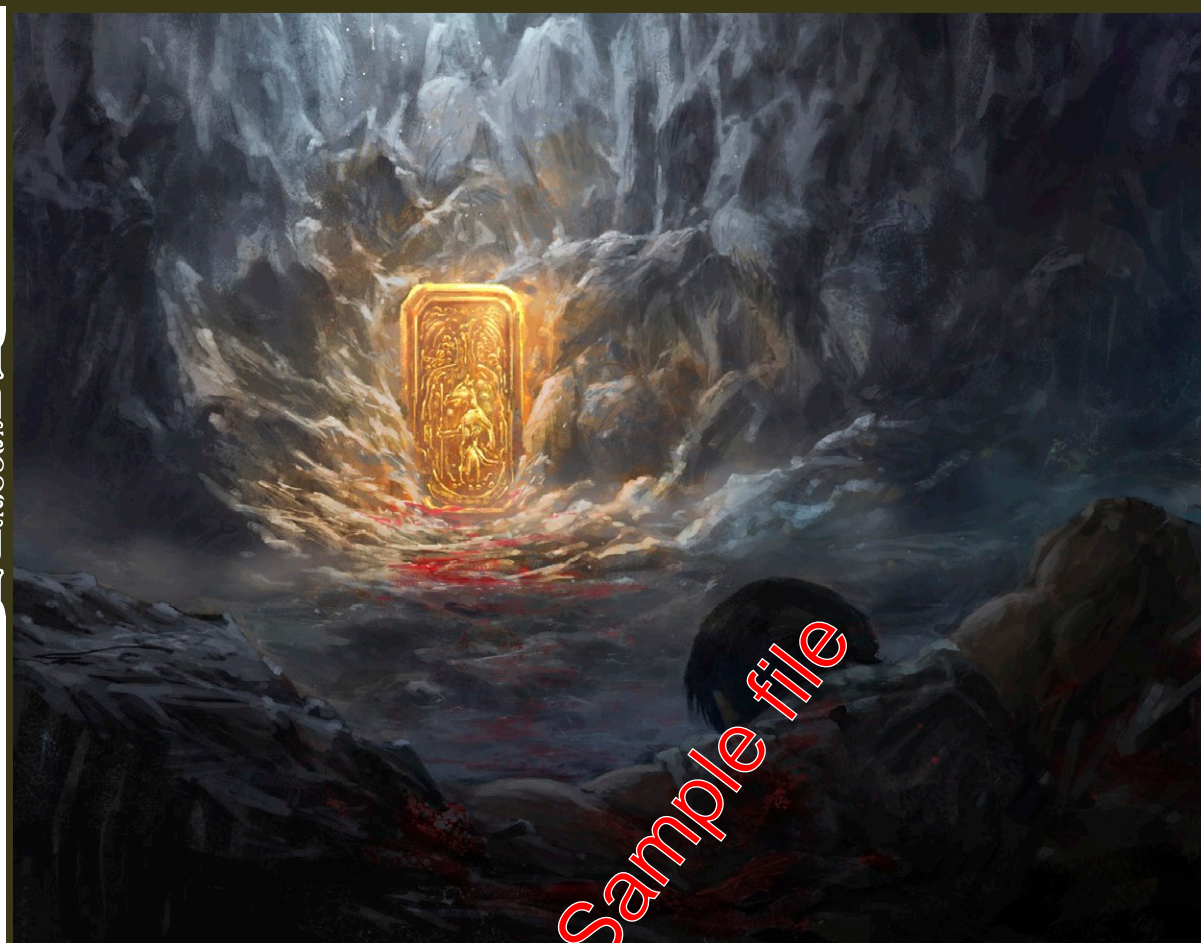




Digging for Lies



**A Fantasy
Role-Playing
Adventure by
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*After prehistoric artifacts turn up alongside modern contraband
at an arms fair, the party pursues a cadre of archaeologists trying
to unearth ancient, deadly magic.*

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INTRODUCTION

Wherein Archaeology Answers Modern Mysteries.

The climax of the first ZEITGEIST adventure occurred in a Danoran observatory, gazing upward at the stars on an island where one could glimpse flashes of other worlds. The second adventure entailed protecting a Risuri prophet who foresaw the future in those stars, and at its conclusion the party discovered a conspiracy hiding within the Bleak Gate, a shadowy plane that parallels the real world.

Now, in the third adventure, the party will find the connection between those seemingly unrelated threads. By investigating why modern inventors and arcane scientists are interested in prehistoric relics, the party can discover the name of an international conspiracy—the Obscurati—and hints of its ultimate goal. But before they can track down the conspiracy's head, they first will have to protect their homeland from an otherworldly invasion held at bay for thousands of years.

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 hand-out, which you can give to the players at the start of the adventure.

BACKGROUND

Thousands of years ago, long before King Kelland defeated the fey titans and founded Risur, monsters and beings from other planes tried to claim this world as their own. Only the most obscure stories provide clues of this time, but occasionally truly ancient ruins were discovered, first by adventurers and more recently by archaeologists.

The current prevailing theory holds that the continent of Lanjyr was briefly home to a civilization of orcs who enslaved goblinoids and minotaurs. None of the ruins have any sort of writing, so scholars use various names—Hill Kings (for the mounds found by most of their ruins), Lithians (for their use of stone tools), or even simply PKPs (for Pre-Kelland People). But most simply call them the Ancients.

All anyone knows about the Ancients is that they built stone and wooden structures, had at least a rudimentary grasp of magic, and possessed no metalworking skills, with the strange exception of goldsmithing. The Ancient ruins found so far have been troves of jewelry, religious totems, and even weapons, all made of gold. Scholars struggle to explain how these primitive people, living in a wilderness supposedly dominated by mighty creatures and capable of only simple mining, were able to craft so elaborate (or so many) golden artifacts.

The true nature of the Ancients is unknown to modern scholarship. But the secrets of the Ancients are not entirely unknown; in fact, the Ancients' true nature is a secret carefully protected by a conspiracy of philosophers known as the Obscurati (or "Ob"), because the Ancients once shaped the fate of the world, and now the Obscurati wish to repeat the feat.

In their exploration of the Ancients' history and magic, the Obscurati have funded archaeological expeditions throughout the continent of Lanjyr. Usually these digs, if they uncover anything, are quickly hidden through a mix of murder and recruitment. But now a dig has gone awry.

ADAPTING THE ADVENTURE.

All the lower level ZEITGEIST adventures assume the PCs are agents of the Royal Homeland Constabulary. If your players are free agents, they were probably let go after adventure two by Chief Inspectress Lady Margaret Saxby, supposedly because keeping them employed would be politically tricky.

Now they might have been hired to work security at the Kaybeau Arms and Technology Exposition, or a Gunsmith, Martial Scientist, or Technologist PC might have a friend with an exhibit there, or have a booth of his own. When the party discovers the relics of Apet, they're approached by Xambria to investigate what happened at her dig in the High Bayou.

If you plan to run this adventure not as part of the ZEITGEIST adventure path, the arms fair can be less technological, and more of a magical bazaar. You can simply spin Apet as a deadly sliver of a far off alien plane that was sealed off ages ago.

THE ANCIENTS AND THE AXIS SEAL.

Modern scholars have a flawed view of ancient history. Those long millennia ago, the first mortal races had just begun to develop cultures when the world was discovered by alien entities.

The Golden Legion of Egal the Shimmering marched from Hell to use this world as a staging ground in an eternal war. Agents of so-called gods contacted their chosen people while dragons and titanic beasts staked out their territories. The hordes of strange creatures that found their way into this world were beyond count, and were only growing more numerous by the day.

The meager villages and tribes of mortals could not fight back the intruders through force of arms, but a handful of clever heroes devised a plan to cut off the pathways to this world. At first they just found portals between planes and sealed them, but then they learned how to lock off a whole plane at once, using a golden plate as both a physical seal and as the focus of the magic. To protect portals from those who would re-open them, the Ancients constructed elaborate ziggurats full of traps and undying guardians.

In an infinite multiverse, these seals were only temporary solutions. Clever foes would always find a new route to a world with such precious resources. But this was part of the Ancients' plan. The invaders eventually abandoned the dead-end worlds, giving the Ancients an opportunity as well as a buffer of safety. The Ancients performed the mighty ritual of the Axis Seal, cutting off all of the planes except for a handful of these dead ends, which they knew were free of invaders.

The planes that are still accessible are detailed in the *Player's Guide*. Apet in particular plays a prominent role in this adventure.

A FATAL FLAW IS REVEALED.

The Ancients made one great mistake. The Gidim, a semi-humanoid race from a far off realm, hid an invasion force on the world of Apet, which the Ancients thought was abandoned like all the other dead-end worlds. Once the Axis Seal was in effect, and they had no competition from other planes, the Gidim struck.

The Ancients 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. The strike by the Gidim devastated the burgeoning Ancient culture, however, and with their heroes dead, the mortal races reverted to their previous primitive state for millennia.

THE COMMON LORE OF APET.

According to modern scholarship and the lore of the skyseers, the massive planet of Apet is the farthest visible world in the star system. The few legends of mages who actually traveled to Apet claim that its surface is just a blasted wasteland of blinding sand and that no creatures live there, though sometimes foreign thoughts poke at your mind from other places or times.

These same legends claim that Apet has no landmarks that allow a traveler to navigate, except for a silvery arc high above in the sky. The ring is said to be the arc of time. Interestingly, it's not a solid ring; about a 30-degree segment is empty. Scholars have theorized for centuries what this might indicate about the nature of the past and future.

Obscurati Archaeology.

The Obscurati have been searching for the original seals in preparation for opening the Axis Seal. To maintain secrecy they first sponsored adventurers, and more recently archaeological expeditions, all of whom have as their liaison a tiefling benefactor, **Caius Bergeron**. Caius reports to Lya Jierre, head of the Golden Cell (see the *ZEITGEIST Campaign Guide*).

One archaeologist, **Dr. Xambria Meredith** of Slate's Mitchell University, led an expedition that discovered the Apet ziggurat in the High Bayou. In Spring earlier this year she reported to Caius and sent back many minor relics from the dig site. In mid-summer, Caius sent a team of experts to open the seal. That's when disaster struck.

Pocket Dimensions.

When the Axis Seal took effect, small slivers of the worlds already sealed by the Ancients were trapped between the two magical bans, like bugs caught by a double-pane window. A handful of creatures survived in stasis, and in the Apet seal that included a Gidim wayfarer called Sijhen. While the rest of its kin were left trapped without sustenance on Apet, Sijhen was only dimly aware of the dreamlike passage of time.

When Xambria's expedition opened the Ancient's first seal to the plane of Apet, Sijhen was freed. Afraid and surrounded by humans, it was drawn to Xambria, who was carrying the *golden icon of Apet*. Sijhen slithered into Xambria's mind and guided her to escape the onslaught of Gidim war-beasts that slew the rest of her dig crew. Then, once she was safe, it coiled in the recesses of her subconscious to observe and learn.

Sijhen realized countless years had passed, but it saw no history of its own people. It tried to use the same old rituals that millennia ago would have let it travel to and from Gidim, but they failed. Unaware of the power of the Axis Seal, Sijhen was left to try to solve a mystery.

It remained hidden in Xambria's body, wary of discover. It hopes to return to the dig site to seek clues, but Xambria's too traumatized and still has too much control to be willing to return. So now Sijhen contents itself with wriggling deeper into her mind, and teasing at clues connected to who hired Xambria for the dig in the first place.

Macbannin's Fallout

In Adventure Two, *The Dying Skyseer*, the PCs took down Reed Macbannin, a district mayor in the city of Flint, and a high-placed member of the Obscurati conspiracy. Macbannin believed himself working on a military research project for Risur's king, but the royalty denied any such plot. Macbannin died in his cell before any more information could be uncovered.

Macbannin had many subordinates working in his laboratory. When they realized they had been working for a traitor, some turned themselves in, but many fled, taking whatever valuables they could get hold of. One of these is **Kaja Stewart**, one of the head researchers developing the soul-burning fuel called witchoil.

Macbannin had also been in league with local crime boss **Lorcan Kell**, who had been making a tidy profit helping smuggle raw materials to the Obscurati's construction facility in the Bleak Gate. Macbannin had been the middle man, and without him, Kell had access to a lot of material, but nowhere to sell it. He had his people track down Kaja Stewart, and in the past few months has set her up as head of a custom magic armaments business.

Finally, Macbannin managed to keep all his illicit activities secret for so long because he had several law enforcement heads in his pocket. This included **Lady Inspectress Margaret Saxby**, the director of the Flint branch of the Royal Homeland Constabulary. She got nervous

when the PCs took down Macbannin, so she moved quickly to get hold of any suspicious evidence from Macbannin's manor, including several obscure texts and ancient relics, which she keeps locked in a trapped safe under her office desk.

Next, she made a point to take the PCs off the case. While there were plenty of leads to follow, she claimed it would look bad for the PCs, who had already been involved with the defeat of Duchess Ethelyn of Shale (see Adventure One, *Island at the axis of the World*) to be tied to the disgrace of another popular politician. Lady Saxby has a reputation for being politically savvy, so word around the RHC office is that she's just worried the PCs will get more popular than her.

In the intervening few months, Lady Saxby has put the party on unrelated assignments, and has let a different squad follow up on the Macbannin case. These other constables are more interested in covering their asses than solving any crimes, and Saxby has encouraged their slow pace.

None of Macbannin's former associates—Lorcan, Kaja, or Lady Saxby—knows of the Obscurati plot, but by piecing together clues that each has, the PCs will be able to outwit the conspiracy going into Adventure Four, *Always on Time*.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The PCs' immediate boss **Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft** orders them to provide extra security for the Kaybeau Arms and Technology Exposition. The PCs are present when strange monsters unknown to modern scholarship appear and attack fair-goers. After killing the monsters, the party learns that the creatures were summoned by an ancient magic staff made of solid gold, which a fair-goer had purchased on the black market.

Only a day into their investigation, the party learns that **Lord Viscount Inspector Nigel Price-Hill**, national director of the RHC, is coming to Flint to oversee an audit of the local branch. PCs who have been cutting corners, breaking the law, or failing to hand over evidence so they could keep it for themselves will have to scramble to avoid punishment.

Through a string of contacts, the party tracks the sale of the staff to Kaja Stewart, who stole the relic and several others from Macbannin's manor. If arrested, she dies soon thereafter, the victim of a fake suicide in jail. Crime boss Lorcan Kell pursues the PCs for harassing his business partner, and various minor threats from the expo keep them busy, but eventually the party connects the relics to Pardwight University.

Hans Weber, the curator of Pardwight's natural history museum, is planning a gala of artifacts of the Ancients, and he can put the PCs in contact with Dr. Xambria Meredith.

Xambria recalls finding the staff at the site of her last expedition, but she claims she was away when disaster struck and all of her cohorts were killed. She suggests the party find Caius Bergeron, who sponsored her dig, then vanished after the disaster. When Caius claims to be a harmless philanthropist, however, the PCs have few options left other than to head to the dig site and scour it for clues.

At the ancient ziggurat, the party must avoid dangerous traps and battle strange creatures from another world. They find the bodies of Xambria's expedition, as well as a group of specialists who had been sent by Caius Bergeron. The golden seal is missing, and a map in the ziggurat points to another possible dig site.

Their presence draws the interest of a long-slumbering fey titan, the serpentine **Voice of Rot**, who believes the lands around the ziggurat are his domain. He tells the party that an interloper from another world

MADNESS OF APET

Several aberrations in the adventure are so bizarre that they tax a character's sanity.

MIND STRAIN

The monsters of Gidim are foreign and horrifying. Creatures who view them struggle to grasp their precise location, and that uncertainty creeps into their minds, slowly eroding their sanity. Several monsters in this adventure can cause the disease Distant Madness.

Distant Madness

Type disease, varies; **Save** Will DC 14

Onset 1 day; **Frequency** 1/day

Effect –2 penalty on all future Will saves after the first failed save. Random insanity following the second failed save (See the *Pathfinder® Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide*™ for Sanity and Madness rules). All subsequent failed saves increase the will save penalty in increments of –2.

Cure 2 consecutive saves, all will penalties are immediately removed following the curing of the disease as well as any acquired insanities.

Special If a player willingly proposes a detrimental course of action appropriate to an acquired insanity, the GM may also reward him with the following special ability.

Insane Insight

Your allies thought you were acting crazy, but in that moment of self-peril, you saw reality from afar and understood your situation with an inhuman clarity.

Training

Requirement: You must have followed a detrimental course of action related to your insanity during this encounter.

Description: Once in the next 5 minutes you gain one of the following benefits:

- Take an additional standard action on your next turn.
- Treat any single d20 die roll as a natural 19.
- Cast one spell without it using a spell slot or being expended.

A character cured of Distant Madness is cured of any insanity he is suffering.



escaped the ziggurat, and that he will punish the mortals in his realm if they do not deal with the intruder for him. The party can use magic to track the foreign planar energy trail left by the creature, which leads them back to Flint.

The trail of planar energy criss-crosses itself and leads to several red herrings, but also goes to Xambria's home, where there are signs of a struggle, but no sign of the woman. The trail also points to Caius's inn, where the PCs find that he has been murdered, and his brain has been devoured. While searching his room for evidence, they learn that Caius sent an expedition to the dig site marked on the map in the ziggurat, off the coast of Ber, several hundred miles away.

Chasing the second expedition, the PCs reach Ber and find three ships in a stand-off. One is owned by Caius, and it tries to protect a group working to open the seal, which is underwater. The second is a Beran archaeology vessel, while the third is a boat Xambria chartered. She claims she was attacked back in Flint, and that she headed for this site, hoping to stop Caius's team before they unleashed more monsters.

The energy trail points to Xambria, though she can explain this away because she has been wearing the *golden icon of Apet*, which she recovered at the first dig site. She plays the frightened innocent, but in truth she has fallen under control of Sijhen. After the party defeats Caius's team, Sijhen bides its time, then distracts the party by summoning monsters. During the disturbance, Sijhen devours the brains of any prisoners, steals the ritual book they used to open the seal, and flees via teleportation.

Xambria was a rising star in the academic world of archaeology, and at 28 she's the youngest professor at Mitchell University in Slate. She has always had a particular interest in Ancient relics, since the golden treasures were so wondrous to behold.

Xambria preferred a hands-on approach to unearthing the secrets of history, and frequently put her life in danger, either on digs in hostile lands, or because the excavations themselves were filled with traps. She enjoyed nothing more than exploring ancient ruin, using a canny mix of caution and daring to avoid curses and traps, or survives the ones she didn't see in advance.

But a month ago something went terribly wrong at one of her digs. For months she had been excavating and exploring a ziggurat of the Ancients, a truly legendary find. She had taken all the proper precautions—careful probing for traps, magical auguries, prayers and supplications to appease the spirits of the land being disturbed. To her dismay, there is a hole in her mind, and she does not know what went wrong.

She remembers leaving for supplies, then returning and finding dead bodies, mangled and mutilated. After that, her memory is a blur. She took a train to Flint, sought shelter with peers at Pardwight University, and struggled to cope with the horrors she'd seen.

Despite her trained athleticism, Xambria dresses conservatively, more comfortable displaying her mind than her body. Now, though, she takes care to cover as much as possible—sometimes when she thinks about what she saw at the dig she can almost feel something trying to wriggle out of her skin.

Though traumatized, Xambria has devoted her life to uncovering mysteries. She wants to find out what killed her dig crew, but somehow she knows that if she goes back to her dig, it will not end well for her.



When the PCs get back to Flint, Pardwight curator Hans Weber asks them to protect the Ancients gala. Xambria attacks the event with a host of monsters, and she tries to steal relics from the ziggurat of Apet. Even if she obtains them, however, she lets the PCs defeat her and quickly surrenders.

This is part of Sijhen's gambit. To get home, it hopes to open a portal to Gidim. But to properly aim that portal, it needs an Ancient star map. Lady Saxby just happened to confiscate one after the downfall of Macbannin, and she keeps it locked up in her office in the RHC headquarters.

Xambria stages her own capture so she'll be brought to the headquarters, and so Saxby will be present. Before her capture, Xambria sends word to the Obscurati that Saxby is planning to turn on them, and so the Ob sends assassins to silence the Chief Inspectress.

Sijhen wants to consume Saxby's brain, as well as those of the assassins, since it plans to return to this world eventually, and wants more knowledge about the Obscurati. It isn't afraid of the mere mortals who stand in its way, but it doesn't realize that the Axis Seal will utterly thwart its attempts to go home.

Shortly after the PCs lock up Xambria in an RHC jail cell, she springs her trap. Using a makeshift portal, monsters and reality-warping energies from Apet pour into the building, letting Xambria escape. She heads for Saxby's office as assassins make their move, all while the other staff of the headquarters are driven mad and turn on each other.

The party must rush to avert several catastrophes, and when they confront Xambria at her portal, a mishap unleashes a massive warbeast, long ago bred by the Gidim and trapped at Apet. To kill it or drive it back, the PCs might have to form a temporarily alliance with Sijhen itself, or else they'll all be killed.

TIMELINE

Xambria discovered the ziggurat in Spring, and the seal around the 15th of Summer. The seal was opened around the 45th of Summer, and Xambria made it back to Flint on the 51st. On the 75th, Caius Bergeron sent another team of Obscurati experts to the dig to bring back the golden seal. They return on the 85th. The team leaves for the sunken ziggurat of Mavisha on Summer 91 (the last day of summer).

The adventure begins on the 1st day of autumn. The PCs will likely spend a few days investigating leads from the arms fair, then take about a week exploring Xambria's dig site and returning. Xambria kills Caius Bergeron on Autumn 7, breaks into Saxby's home on the 8th, and leaves for Ber on the 9th. She arrives at the sunken ziggurat on the 15th.

The PCs likely get back to Flint on the 12th of Autumn, and probably spend a day or two following leads before they set out for the sunken ziggurat. Sailing to the ziggurat in Ber requires at least three days, most likely a week, but Xambria and the Obscurati experts will both still be there.

The Ancients Gala opens on the 31st of Autumn, though curator Hans Weber waits to put the three Ancient relics (amulet, blade, and staff) on display until the PCs are available to provide protection. Xambria, likewise, waits to strike until the PCs are present, because she wants her arrest to be convincing.

Feel free to adjust the timeline to give the adventure a tense pace. In particular, if your PCs would refuse to let the case sit fallow for the long term, you might move the adventure's start to a just a week or two after the end of *The Dying Skyseer*.