

## Zeitgeist Journal, Chapter 3: “Digging for Lies”

### Episode 3-1

Since the events of chapter 2, “The Dying Skyseer,” the party has been on relegated to menial tasks by the Chief Inspectress, Margaret Saxby, until the completion of the audit by Viscount Inspector Nigel Price-Hill. It is now the 1<sup>st</sup> of Autumn, the opening day of the Kaybeau Arms Fair and expo in Flint. With unspent funds in A-Teams account totaling 8,000 GP, Inspectress Saxby tasks the party with scouring the fair for unique purchases to ensure their account is 0 balance before the end of the fiscal year. At least the team is finally getting out of the office for the first time since the Macbannin case.

The fair brings with it ample distraction as the party splits to explore what wonders Midgard has to offer from international vendors showing of their wares and inventions, some for the first time in Flint. The Ninja antes 1,000 GP (health and resurrection insurance) to try his luck in Grimtooth's “Fun” home security system challenge before a massive audience of spectators. To the disappointment of the crowd, the Ninja makes it through the danger rooms without injury, regaining his ante and the prize: a Portal slinging crossbow. Furious, the Orcish mage packs up his sales booth and leaves town, unable to impress anyone with his failed traps. The party also linked up with Mourn, a 7' 6” half-dragon adopted son of Berian Ambassador Brakken. Mourn, being a friend of the party Cleric, decided to enjoy the fair in the company of the party after watching the ninja's performance through Grimtooth's fun house.

The Rookie Gnome gets taken in by a enchanting snake oil saleswoman, who convinces him to buy a bottle of her “world famous cure-all” for 100 GP after witnessing its miraculous effects on a crippled audience member who was healed instantly on stage!

As the party continued to move through the crowds, one of the more perceptive noticed they were being tailed by Viscount Price-Hill's director of Infiltration, Lauryn Cynburg.



Almost as soon as she was spotted, she turned and disappeared into the crowd. Before the Rookie could try to pursue, someone bumped into him as the throngs of fairgoers edged past him.

Touching his weapon belt, the Gnome suddenly realized someone had taken his weapon! In hot pursuit, he chased down a 10 year old street rat who had nicked his weapon in a pickpocket.

The orphan human, “Tip,” agreed to return the stolen item, and bragged that he would be an excellent guide and informant, for a price. The party agreed to pay him to canvas the fair for any gossip, and from that point, kept a eye out for him or any other thieves that may be trying to steal their loot.

Shortly thereafter, the party shopped around the fair, test firing the Nock Gun (the gnome rolled a negative number on his attack roll and nearly kill himself), the steamsuit armor, the Bader Gun (the gnome got chased around the shooting range by a very upset badger after he teased it following another player's test fire), as well as other unique firearms and weapons.

Mourn noticed a suspicious looking dwarf with a sniper rifle, who he then cordially confronted.



The Military dress, and fine craftsmanship of the dwarf's rifle suggested that he was a Drakrian, and he responded with transparent friendliness to the Morun, even offering to let him hold and examine the masterwork weapon. Convinced that the Dwarf was just a typical fair goer, Mourn diverted his attention elsewhere, as music started playing, and Rock Rackus made his entrance.



(Theme song plays: Cage the Elephant “Ain't no rest for the wicked” which is a proxy for “Too Poor to be Lazy.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKtsdZs9LJo> )

Apparently Rock Rackus has an overt fetish for gnomes, as he was a relentless flirt with the gnome rookie while she showboated with his diamond encrusted piece on the shooting range.

The braggart barely had enough time to tell of his sexual prowess in song forum, recounting a the story of how he cuckolded the Fey King (without permission), when a shriek pieced the conversation.



A giant eldrich abomination lifted a bystander and swallowed him whole, yet the creature was merely a gaping maw that did not even touch his body when he passed through one side and out the other, and yet the poor victim could do no more than lay twitching on the ground.

As a hedge mage with a golden staff charged into the fray, but every casting of magic missile from his staff summoned another and another creature from the ether... Realizing after several volleys that the wand was also summoning the monsters with the magic missile, the RHC constables shouted for him to stop using the staff, and the embarrassed mage complied. The Monsters stopped appearing.

Tip was even lifted off of the ground by what could only be described as a giant mosquito like monster.

Racing into action, the A-Team fought back the monsters as they attacked the crowds, saving Tip, but arriving too late to stop several others from being carried off or swallowed. Rock Rackus sprung into action until covering fire from Kvarti Gorbatiy, but in the dock hero's haste, he blasted away an innocent bystander in the process of felling several of the horrors as they attacked the crowd.

By the time the smoke cleared, two of the flying monsters fled the scene, and many civilians laid convulsing on the ground. Rock Rackus stood triumphant over his quarry as the local police promptly bashed his face in to arrest him for manslaughter. He claimed self-defense and the necessity of the moment to respond, even if it put the public at risk, but the cops would hear none of it as they accused

the star of resisting arrest and began beating as he screamed “police brutality!”

At this point, a crowd had gathered, and began booing the RHC as the gnome herself cuffed Rock Rackus and took him away to the RHC HQ in Flint. Just before a mob can gather, Kvarti fires his rifle into the ground, and claims to have witness Rock Rackus shooting the innocent bystander as he was attempting to protect the crowd. The police extract a gold bullet from the body, matching Rackus' signature slugs. The crowds disperse thanks to the dwarf's intervention, and Rackus is taken away.

Meanwhile, the rest of the A-team questioned the hedge mage who had been weilding the golden staff, which was now transmuted back into wood.

Completely cooperative with the Constables, the hedge mage admitted that he did not have a license to practice magic or buy magical devices, as he was a self-taught librarian by trade. He had come to the fair hoping to get his hands on a couple of wands without having to complete a background check. While he was snooping around the trinket stand hoping to find an unscrupulous vendor, he was told to meet a trench coated lady a couple of blocks from the fair, and he was sold the staff, no questions asked.

After confiscating the staff in question, the A-team began exiting the fair to report back to the RHC HQ, when none other than Assistant Chief Inspector Delft met them on their way out, holding poor Tip by a twist of his ear, as he followed behind the limping constable hunched over in an open steamsuit armor that he had tried to make off with in the confusion. It seems like the party's suspended boss was back to his old self and in good form. As a show of confidence, Luxen (the ninja) handed Delft back his revolver. Their old boss smiled. “I'll be back on duty in no time. Just you guys wait.” He was in good spirits.

### **Episode 3-2**

The next day, the A-Team returned back to the Fairgrounds to search for the fence who had sold the unlicensed mage the mysterious staff.

Linking up with Thomas Kellion esq, the A-Team gained access to a private party hosted by Pemberton Industries. After calling a favor from Morgan Cippiano, who was brought to a truce meeting with Lorcan Kell by Benedict Pemberton (did not end well, MC's body guard walked away short an ear), the party managed to coordinate a sting operation to conduct an undercover buy of some more magical contraband from the seller who had fenced the mysterious staff.



While Thomas Kellion stalled Kaja Stewart with an inspection of the merchandise, Luxen attempted to backstab her with poison... and flubbed both the surprise round attack and the initiative attack. She quickly retreated, and opened up with a volley from a giant cannon she summoned from a magical portal... nearly killing the ninja in a single blow!

After a desperate battle, the A-team managed to wrestle Kaja to the ground and make the arrest. Now it is time to question her as to where she got these three items...

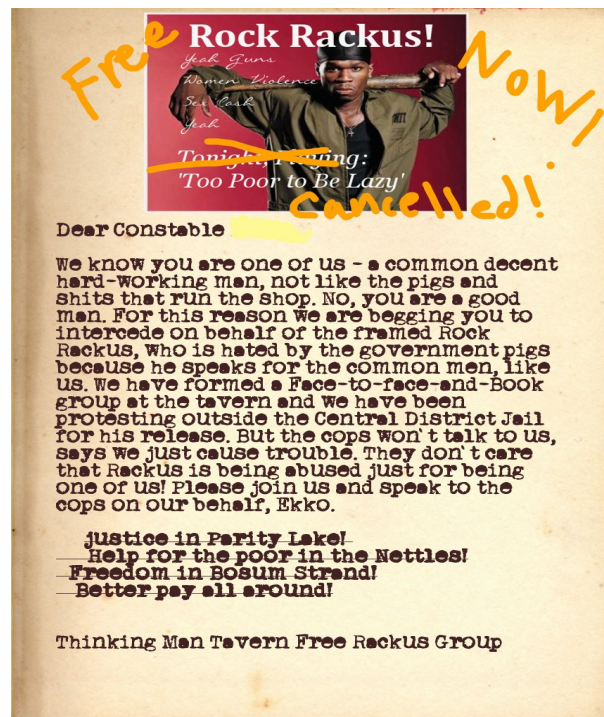
But wait, where did the amulet go?

### **Thomas Kellion, the Conservator's hideout...**

Examining the strange amulet, Thomas decided to activate its magical ability, accidentally summoning a giant maw like creature from the void! Alone, he struggled desperately from the creatures clutches, slowly going insane as he barely managed to break the tentacle's grapple and flee for his life! Having flash backs of his near death in the buried coffin, his personality fragmented... making him a whole other person for a time... the Arbiter!

### **Chapters 3-3 through 3-7**

Upon return to the RHC, A-Team observed a sizable crowd of dockers protesting the arrest of Rock Rackus, citing police brutality, and the double standard within law enforcement over extra-judicious killing. The civilian casualties caused by the Flint Police firing into the crowd's at the Skyseer rally last month is still fresh on everyone's mind, and the bawdy street performance art reflects the contradiction that Rackus should be so sternly dealt with as a "public menace" for merely the public at the arms fair. Surely the shooting of the bystander was the work of police or RHC; Rackus was a convenient scape goat to pin the fiasco on.



### **Interrogation Room**



Kaja genuinely has no idea how the staff summoned the monsters. She simply fenced the items, and even when she worked for Macbannin in his witchoil lab on Cauldron Hill, all she knew was that the items came from some archaeological site. She did not get a chance to examine them for danger before she stole them and ran.

She recalled a tiefling showing up at the laboratory when the items arrived, and Macbannin being upset, saying something about it “com- promising protocol.” She described the tiefling as a wealthy noble tiefling with a rugged chin, though she had no idea about the man’s name, location, or affiliations.

Rock Rackus meanwhile was making a ruckus in his finely furnished cell, scating an experimental ditty as the gnome approached to taunt him for his predicament. Ever the flirt, Rackus pontificated about a trip he made to the moon and and wicked cool Ziggurat of Jessie... The party made their best effort to convince the docker celebrity that the public could use a better role model, but the gods only know if the appeal to his better nature fell on deaf ears.

While A-Team conducted their interrogations, Mourn pulled some strings with the team cleric, Inspector-Chaplain Damocles, in order to get the RHC morgue to release a corpse of one of the strange creatures that had assaulted the crowds at the arms fair. Mourn made arrangements with his former mentor from the Battalion military academy, COL Sebastain Harlock, to have an autopsy performed on the dead thing.

### **Stover Delft's Office**



As A-Team booked Kaja Stewart into the RHC jail, Carlao was still overwhelmed with juggling his acting assistant chief inspector duties with his leadership of Delta team. Once again, the inspector seemed disinterested in the details of A-Team's investigation, as long as it was making progress. Carlao did have a favor to ask, however. The Delta team cleric, the Dwarve known as Dima, was on assignment following up on a homicide report believed to be in connection with the radical eschatologist case (ongoing Delta team priority one). Unfortunately, the crime scene had the cleric stumped, and without the time to visually inspect the scene himself, Carlao asked A-Team to assist with the on-scene autopsy, perhaps offering some insight into the cause of death.

“Just don't let Lady Saxby know. She'd have a conniption if she knew I was expanding your involvement in ongoing cases right now.”

### **Parity Lake Steel Mill (The Mangled Golem Case)**

Following Carlao's directions on the back on an envelop, A-Team made their way to a steel mill in Parity Lake, where they found Dima puzzling over a putrid mess as he puffed his cigar.



“Looks like Kell-Guild Mischief, open and shut, if it wasn't for this damn golem. I don't know what to make of it.” Dima confessed as A-Team examined the crime scene, “I don't see this being related to the eschatology ring, truth be told.”

The burning steel and firegems concealed the stench of decomposition, but workers found him just yesterday. The man had to have been dead for weeks at least. What got the case kicked over to the RHC was the presence of two strange things: a ring of rusted iron, and a slender golem which is torn to pieces.

The victim's wrists were bound together by a twisted steel bar, as were his ankles. It would take either magic or great strength to bend the steel, and this was done very precisely.

He had some sort of necklace, because links remain near his body, but most of it is missing. The chain matches the amulets used at Macbannin's manor to slip partially into the Bleak Gate.

The victim has been dead for a while, and the remains are greatly deteriorated, suggesting the date of death was some time early in the Summer. The apparent cause of death is a shattered skull, and the size of the wound matches the fist of the damaged golem in the corner. A cursory look determines the man was a human in his fifties or sixties. He has an old gunshot wound in his leg. His teeth suggest he received dental care from a Risuri army doctor.

Probing the victim's throat or closely examining the body reveals nearly a pint of witchoil, some of which the victim swallowed. However there is no soul energy trapped in the oil; if the man had died while the oil was anywhere nearby, his soul should have been sucked in.

The victim had 5 platinum pieces and twenty gold pieces in his pocket, as well as a bundle of papers with ship schedules, berth numbers, and mentions that passengers were welcome, all of which were set to depart between the 5th and 15th of Summer. All of them were bound for Elfaivar. His socks have the initials “A.G.” stitched into them.

The party, ever wary that they are still under audit, opted not to embezzle any of the coinage on the body.

The golem is in a hundred pieces. Its chest is “only” torn into four components, while its face cracked apart into countless tiny pieces. The main bulk of its “skull” looks intact, though, and it feels quite heavy, which suggests a newly-crafted internal structure appropriate for containing an advanced intelligence.

The body is unimposing. Before it was smashed to bits it probably stood about 5-foot-6, slender, mostly bronze. But again its internal structure is of the nest quality, with miniscule gears in the hands that would have allowed nuanced movements. The face, shattered though it is now, could once have displayed fantastic expressions. The party's technologist gnome has never seen such wondrous craftsmanship. It looks too fragile to use as a warrior, though.

There are a few chain links amid the golem's wreckage that match the necklace the victim was wearing.

Oddly, it looks like the golem wasn't hit by an object; it was torn apart, almost like it exploded along every major seam and joint. The head of the golem still possesses an aura of magic, suggesting the thing might still be conscious, just blind and mute.

Looking around the scene, everything has a new layer of ash, which just drifts onto everything in the factory, even in the basement.

The party can find several inches of torn fabric by the rusted ring. It's several layers stitched together of cotton and dyed silk, and Inspector Teninbrus surmises it's likely from an eladrin woman's dress, the sort made before the Great Malice. The threads have residual magic on them, which given how long they've been removed from the garment suggests the enchantment was very powerful to begin with.

A few ingots of iron stored on nearby shelves have fallen onto the ground, and a few are below the victim's body. The ingots were shaken free, probably during the earthquake in the summer, but there's no sign of ash on top of them, which suggests the victim died very soon after the quake.

The Party passes all of this extra information to Dima, who becomes even more confused, but thanks the party for their input, before filling out paperwork to request a master technologist from Slate to temporary transfer to Flint HQ to attempt to repair the golem. Only time will tell if memory banks of the construct will hold the secrets to what happened.

### **Pardwight University**

Returning to their own case, A-Team traveled to the archeology department of Pardwight University in Flint's Central district in hopes of gleaning expert knowledge on the origins of the artifacts from Kaja Stewart's smuggling ring. Perhaps the identity of the tiefling noble who consorted with Mayor MacBannin could be discovered by someone with knowledge about the origins of the artifacts.

As it turns out, the department head of archaeological studies at Pardwight University, Professor Hans Weber, recognized the artifacts outright as having originated from a prehistoric civilization of orcs, known only as "The Ancients." In fact, the particular pieces that were smuggled by Kaja had gone missing from a dig site at a recently uncovered ziggurat in the swamps of Agate. Apparently there was some sort dig rights dispute between the local district government, and both Pardwight University in Flint and Mitchell University in Slate. Because of local Berian nationalists in the Agate swamps of southern Risur, the district government was keen to keep all finds in the possession of local museums, yet the local office of conservation had issued dig permits to both universities in specific zones of the swamp, even though the survey for the assigned areas were poorly (perhaps intentionally) done. One DR Meredith Xambria from Mitchell University stumbled upon the Ziggurat in what Professor Weber claims was within the rights zone for Pardwight University. Weber was in the process of negotiating a co-use agreement of the dig site when to his surprise, a breathless Dr Xambria awoke him at his campus residence in the middle of the night, begging for refuge. Seeing an opportunity for a better deal in the rights negotiation, Professor Weber gladly offered Dr Xambria a discrete room in the University



dormitory.

### **The Pardwight Archaeological Dorm**



A-team quickly found Dr Xambria in her room, and she welcomed the party into her quarters warmly. Quirky and energetic, almost manic, the archeologist regaled the party the details leading up to a horrible tragedy that had befallen the dig site. Dr Xambria explained that her expedition was funded by a wealthy teifling noble by the name of Caius Bergeron, who's description matched the one given by Kaja Stewart for Mayor MacBannin's mysterious guest. The Archeologist explained that her benefactor had shown a keen interest in her theories about the prehistoric ancients, whom she believed did not actual forge their own weapons out of gold, but instead pilfered them from a demonic race that warred with them. Sadly, Meredith could never get published in peer-reviewed work, other archeologists saying her “crackpot theories will be the laughingstock of the journal...” But when she published an opinion piece in the Slate Weekly, she was approached the very day of its printing by an associate of Bergeron who had a suitcase full of money and a train ticket. How could she refuse?

When the party asked about what became of the dig, Dr Xambria, was unable to recall the fate of her team. Her memory was too foggy, likely due to PTSD. She was certain some madding horror was uncovered in the ziggurat, an catastrophe soon after struck the expedition. All she knew was that that she was the sole survivor, and in her desperation she fled to the Bole station and took the first train back to Flint. And with that, Dr Xambria announced it was time for her “medication” and she offered the party a hit from her fey pepper pipe. Inspector Luxen blushed and quickly refused, knowing not only that they were on duty, but that the controlled substance was illicit and that A-Team was still under investigation and possibly surveillance from internal affairs. The bard, Iravis, wasn't so disciplined, and was ready for a relapse. Ever since his exposure to the drug during the MacBannin Case, he's been sober, but the offer made him begin to itch, and he quietly returned to Dr Xambria's apartment after the party continued on. The pair became high with laughter and fey pepper, and spent several hours petting any stroking various parts of one another, but when time came when Iravis attempted to undo Meredith's blouse, she suddenly became sober and flustered, and politely asked him to try again when they both had their wits about them. Taking the hit, the bard made his graceful exit for the evening.

### **The Silver Swan Inn (North Shore)**

As the A-Team entered the Silver Swan Inn, it was immediately apparent that only high rollers stayed at the establishment. In the atrium, there was a solid ice swan sculpture with a fountain of Drakrian Vodka flowing from the birds mouth as it arched its neck in a graceful bend and sprayed the

spirits over its back. The lights were dim as the concierge escorted the constables into the lounge area where Mr Bergeron has spent most of this daylight hours for the last several weeks. On each of his thighs sat a voluptuous teifling woman, bot of which had their tails snaked around either his arms or legs, caressing either his cheeks or abdomen. His full attention was trained on the stage, however, as the stunning diva belted her lyrics.

Song: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFrMDGfW\\_Sg&list=RDTFrMDGfW\\_Sg#t=0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFrMDGfW_Sg&list=RDTFrMDGfW_Sg#t=0)

As Iravis entered the room, he felt a strange premonition that the song was somehow prophetic, as if the universe had somehow timed his arrival perfectly with lovely lady's setlist, but he couldn't quite place why he felt this strange sense of foreboding from such a beautiful refrain.



Confronting Caius Bergeron, the party felt sure that they could get the nobleman to self-incriminate, but instead of feeling intimidated, Caius invited the constables to sit with him, and offered them drinks and women. Annoyed, the constables refused, and attempted to accuse Bergeron of colluding with Mayor MacBannin. At this point, Caius shrugged and asked to see a warrant. When the investigators couldn't produce one, the teifling suggested they find one, along with their senses, and the excused himself back to watching the show. When pressed, he just told the party to contact his lawyer to resolve any concerns they might have.

Unstatisfied, Luxen Teninbrus picked the lock to Caius' room and discovered some notes corroborating Xambria's story, and marking the location of the Apet Ziggurat on a map of Lanjyr. With this information, the A-Team decided that their next stop needed to be to this Ziggurat to collect additional evidence.

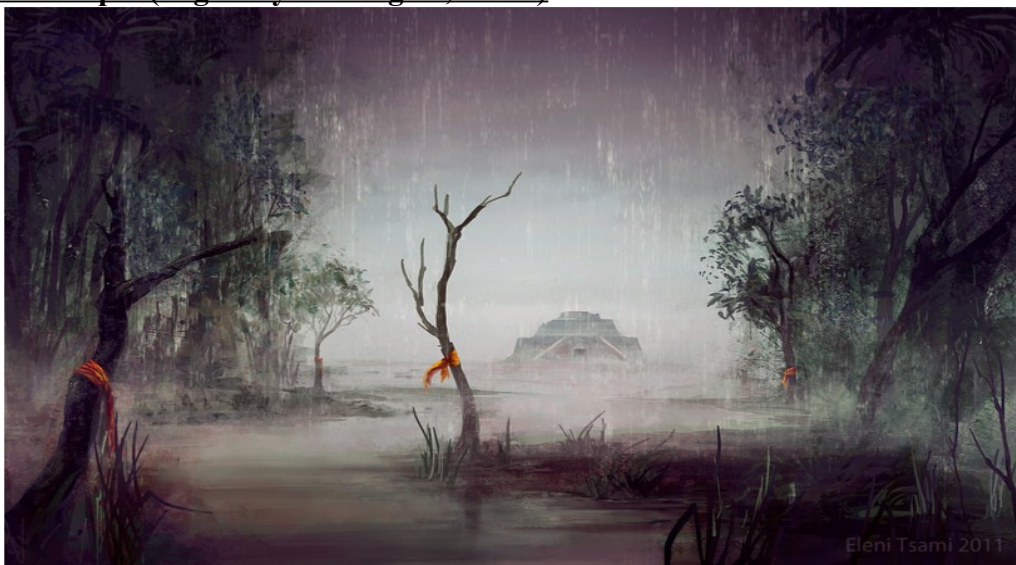


### **The Bole Train Station (Bole, Risur)**

As personal guests of Professor Weber, the A-Team travelled with a new expedition from Pardwight University to try to regain contact with the lost expedition. While at the final train station in Bole, the party solved a murder mystery involving a fey titan cult worshipping the old fey titan known as the "Voice of Rot,"

obtaining an artifact of old Risur, known as the "Eye of Dukain" which was thought to be a pommel broken from the hilt of a legendary sword belonging to one of the first kings of Risur. Ultimately, the murder of a digger was found to be caused by an archaeologist who had been possessed by the spirit of King Dukain from early Risurian history. A local Berian nationalist cult, known as the Crimson Sash, attempted to steal the "Eye of Dukain" in order to summon the Fey Titan known as the Voice of Rot who is said to slumber in the swamps of Agate. Luxen Tenibrus recovered the Eye, (keeping it to himself), but even though A-team foiled the cultist plot and solved the murder, a mob of local ethnic Berian protestors (concerned about protecting their historical artifacts) stormed the train station and drove off the Pardwight team in a riot, and the A-Team went to ground in the local swamps to continue their mission to the Ziggurat alone.

### **The Ziggurat of Apet (High Bayou of Agate, Risur)**



Upon arrival at the Ziggurat, the party delved into a dangerous dungeon of traps, eventually finding a strange portal to another plane that corrupted and warped the bodies of the deceased dig team. While the mutated bodies remained, as well as the traps left by the Ancient architects, someone had obviously been through the camp removing evidence. As the party entered the portal room, they triggered a final trap that began a flood of poisonous sludge that forced the party to flee for their lives. Barely escaping, the party emerged from the temple to a horde of hundreds of undead surrounding them. Fleeing up the structure, the party made a desperate last stand before the colossal zombie serpent avatar of the Voice of Rot intervened and rescued the party by single handedly destroying all of the undead.

The fey titan explained to the party that the dig team unleashed a sentient, extraplanar being with all of the mindless beasts encountered at the arms fair, and that the disturbance of his slumber angered him. In honoring the great covenant with the king Dukain, the Voice of Rot was content to spare the party in exchange for embarking on a mission to punish the mysterious extraplanar being by wounding it or banishing it. To this end, the Voice of Rot granted A-team the ability to sense extra-planar energy. The party then tracked two scents of the plane of Apet back to Flint...

### **Extra-planar Energy tracking (Agate, to Bole, to Flint)**

Using the boon granted by the Fey-Titan, A-Team sensed two separate trails leading away from the

Ziggurat back to Bole. Questioning locals revealed that a Female teifling sorcerer and small retinue of dwarvish body guards brought back a large object from the temple and loaded it onto a freight car on a train bound for Flint. Returning to Flint, the party tracked the scent leading back to Lady Saxby's Manor, but the residence was gated with armed guards, and the party was unable to gain access to check their senior boss' house. From there, the same trail led to Dr Xambria's dormitory, where there were no signs of forced entry, but there were signs inside that a struggle had destroyed the apartment. Dr Xambria was nowhere to be found. Then, the party followed the trail to the Silver Swan Inn, where they found Caius Bergeron's dead body in his room, with his jaw unhinged and his brain sucked out through his pallet. On the table map, an new "X" had been marked since the last time Luxen was sneaking through the room. It showed the location of another Ziggurat in the ocean, in Berian national waters off of the coast of Pezarillo, Ber. Returning back to the RHC, the party reported its findings to Carlao, who warned the party against accusing the Chief Inspectress without solid evidence. Inspector Teninbrus waited until after normal office hours and broke into Saxby's office, disabling the trap on her personal safe, and unlocking it, revealing the star map. Luxen then stole the star map.

A trip down to the docks revealed that Dr Xambria had chartered a vessel, the *RMS Dagger*, logging a departure for Pezarillo, just days after a party matching the description of the teifling and her dwarves who had taken the large object from the Ziggurat at Apet. Dock logs further revealed that the Crisillyri mercenary vessel the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer*, set sail for Pezarillo about 5 days prior to the *RMS Dagger*. A-Team returned to RHC HQ, and requisitioned the *RNS Roscommon* for an immediate departure.

### **The Ziggurat of Mavisha (Berian National Waters, off the coast of Pezarillo, Ber)**

Upon arrival at the coordinates marked on the chart in Bergeron's hotel room, the A-Team discovered not only the *RMS Dagger* and the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer*, but also a Berian Vessle, the *BNS La Inspiración*. After signaling to the other ships, the party quickly became reunited with Dr Xambria, who's ship had arrived just a few hours before the *RNS Roscommon*. Aboard the the *BNS La Inspiració*, a frustrated Berian goblin archeologist named Paco de Los Loros explained that his sub-surface dig site was unlawfully trespassed by a team of tomb raiders aboard the Crisillyri vessel. The Conservator went over side, and climbed the stern of the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer* and stole into the cozy captain's quarters where he stole a letter left next to the window.



Memorandum for Finona Duvall,

I was impressed by the flawless professionalism of your clean-up at the High Bayou excavation. The previous expedition was staffed with cavalier fools, but you emerged unscathed from peril, which highlights your intellect and acumen. I think you have the potential to benefit my associates greatly, and if your work continues to be of this masterful caliber, I shall recommend you be brought in more fully.

To wit, I trust you will handle this your fourth dig site with the same skill. However, for your new Drakran bodyguards, this will be their first time opening a seal. I am confident neither is so loutish and disruptive as Master Rackus was at the ziggurat of Jiese. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we avoid a disaster like what occurred at the bayou ziggurat.

The magic and defenses at these ruins are complex and secretive, so while I thoroughly trust your familiarity with the dangers, we need take no unnecessary risks.

Firstly, each of the golden seals were crafted by the Ancients specifically to close a portal to another world. Examination of the relief images on each suggests hostile creatures had been entering our world through these portals, and that the Ancients used the seals to slow an invasion. The creatures were not of any known modern race. Be certain your allies are forewarned, and keep close eye on their mental stability. At least once disaster has struck because someone panicked at the revelation that the world was much larger than their current conception.

Second, the peculiar nature of the seal magic appears to have trapped a small mote of the other world on the far side of the portal. I suspect that this somehow redirected the existing portals to this pocket dimension, and that perhaps simply closing the portal was beyond the skill of the Ancients. Though ages have passed, and we can only assume the invasion forces were stopped somehow, each time we have opened one of these seals, creatures have survived within. Make sure everyone is armed at all times and ready for battle.

Third, the hostile creatures appear to have belonged to different factions, as the seals of Jiese, Nem, and Apet depict distinct sorts of creatures. The Ancients clearly dealt with threats from worlds beyond those known to us today, since the beings that emerged from the ziggurat of Apet do not match any of the current lore of that world. Indeed, the strange beasts were not even the same sort as portrayed on the seals. Do not presume that simply because you are opening a portal to the plane of water that any creatures beyond must share the same elemental affiliation. Use multiple warding circles in your initial explorations; we can afford the expense.

Fourth, either time or magic has had the effect of concentrating the inherent planar energy within the mote beyond the seals. When the Mavisha seal is finally opened, expect intense energy to pour out. This will probably just be elemental water energy, but as always, precautions rule the day. Make sure first to know the nature of the energy, and set up appropriate wards. If possible, do not be nearby when the seal opens.

Finally, while we have endeavored to maintain a certain discretion in our activities, we have attracted the unfortunate attentions of an RHC squad, and I fear we might be being watched by agents of the Unseen Court. Be prepared for attack from without as well as within when you're at the dig. Afterward, maintain the greatest discretion in transporting the golden seal. If necessary, abandon it so you can make sure to reach me with your research. While a ton of gold is valuable in its own right, we're fairly certain any gold suffices for these seals, so your examinations of the abjurations are more valuable than the physical artifact.

Please try to enjoy your journey. Seobriga in Autumn is lovely, and I trust the more rustic charms of the land around the ziggurat of Mavisha will provide a pleasant respite from the stress of avoiding ancient curses and otherworldly carnivores. I await your return with an admitted enthusiasm, and I insist you recount your journey with the utmost detail while enjoying the finest wines from my family's vineyards.

Do be safe, Finona.

Your benefactor and cohort,  
Caius Bergeron

P.S., If complications arise, do try to wrap up before Winter. It would be a treasure if you could accompany me by train from Beaumont on the 12th. I have a meeting to attend on the 20th in Vendricce, after which I plan to stay in Crisillyr for a few months. I would love the company of a vivacious young woman, since my host is somewhat too aged and philosophical for my tastes.

Upon return to the *RNS Roscommon*, the A-Team decided to split with half the team descending to the underwater Ziggurat while the other half maintained a vigil in case the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer* attempted an attack. As soon as the dive team was over side, the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer* moved to attack position.

In the underwater temple, several magic-engineered lamps converted seawater into 10 foot radius bubbles of air. Inside of these bubbles, the teifling sorcerer, Finona Duvall, was performing a very delicate sealing ritual with the assistance of a couple of mages. As the A-Team approached, two sharks and an octopus moved to attack under the control of a druid as Luxen threw a smoke bomb into the middle of the ritual circle, triggering a massive vortex that nearly swept the party away, and nearly unleashed a massive water elemental. As the party attempted to capture Finona, Fishmen emerged from the uncontrollable portal, and attempted to move the lanterns in order to allow the horror from the other side to emerge.

Topside, both the *RNS Roscommon* and the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer* were interrupted in their

maneuvers by an emerging whirlpool that both ships began circling. As both ships began descending the drain, the Masters of both ships attempted in vain to achieve escape velocity while the gun crews unsuccessfully fired volleys of cannon balls at one another. The First Mate of the RNS Roscommon activated the bow's magical jaunt ability, and managed to fly out of the maelstrom at a speed of about 30 knots, putting the ship airborne.

Bellow, Finona convinced the dive team to assist in resealing the portal, lest they all be dashed to smithereens by the uncontrollable seas. Once the oceans were stable, the sorcerer and her guards surrendered.

Topside, as the whirlpool closed, the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer* was nearly crushed by the waves, dislodging the rudder chain, and leaving the ship dead in the water. The crew of the RNS Roscommon rapidly conducted a boarding action, and accepted the surrender of the captain of the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer*. Shortly thereafter, Finona and her team were imprisoned on the *RNS Roscommon*, while the remainder of the crew from the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer* remained stranded at anchor without a rudder while A-Team attempted to figure out what to do with all the prisoners.

Suddenly, the party saw fires lit aboard both the *RMS Dagger* and the *CMS Il Draçon de Mer*. Boarding the vessels to assist, the A-Team discovered that all aboard both vessels were dead, their brains sucked from the pallets of their mouths. Dr Xambria was nowhere to be found, and traces of teleportation magic suggested that she was responsible, and fled with a spell.

#### **The Gala of the Ancients (Pardwight University Museum, Flint)**

As A-Team pulled into the Flint harbor, their former boss, Stover Delft was already waiting for them at the docks. It seems as if he had been staying busy during his suspension, as he approached the party, he exchanged few formalities before he cut straight to business. While he had no official authority over A-Team, he still held reverent power, as he had been a competent and understanding boss during his time at the RHC, not to mention he had always been a loyal ally when things looked their worse. And even now, with Delft disgraced, he was still dedicated to his job. He handed a couple of sheets of paper to Luxen. The first of which was an set of invitations to the upcoming “Gala of the Ancients” at the Parwight University Museum. The second, was a cryptic and mad sounding scrawling from what seemed to be Dr Xambria to Professor Weber.





Lovely to meet you again the other day,  
and fascinating to see the Staff of the  
Ancients that you showed me. I hope the  
RHC will permit me to exhibit this on the  
31st Autumn for the Gala of the Ancients.  
I enclose an invitation for you and your  
team as a reminder.

I spoke the other day to a colleague here  
at the Museum who was fascinated by  
your encounter with extra-planar  
organisms at the Kaybeau Armament and  
Technology Exposition.

His name is Colonel Sebastian Harlock.  
He was wondering if you might drop into  
the museum and meet him, after I  
recommended your character and  
integrity.

Best of luck, see you soon.

Professor Hans Weber,  
Professor of Antiquities and Curator of  
the Museum of Natural History.

HANS -  
HELP ME  
IT FOLLOWED ME FROM THE DIG  
IT HAS ME  
I ONLY HAVE A MOMENT  
IT WANTS THE THREE RELICS  
WARN THE CONSTABLES.  
IT TALKS IN MY MIND  
I KNOW THINGS I COULDN'T  
ITS NAME IS SJHEN  
I HEAR THE WORD GIDIM  
GIDIM GIDIM? GIDIM  
A PEOPLE? A WORLD?  
ANOTHER NAME, A NAME IT'S CURIOUS ABOUT  
OBSCURATI  
OBSCURATI?  
OBSCURATI

After dropping off Finona Duvall and her companions at the RHC jail, A-Team gussied up for the Gala, and arrived just before the opening. Delft worked the room while the rest of the team explored the museum.

Hobnobbing with the pretentious wasn't really all it that, but not long into the evening, Dr Xambria smashed through the skylight, along with several eldritch abominations at her command.

The skylight above the Ancient gala hall shatters, and a woman in black leather descends on a silk rope amid the crashing glass. She flicks her head to adjust a braid of red hair, revealing Xambria's face. But something in her eyes is different—cold, calculating, alien.

She carries Xambria's old miner's pick, but does not wear the golden icon necklace you've seen her with every time before.

A security guard takes a step toward her, but she pulls back her miner's pick as a threat, and the man pauses. A hush falls over the crowd.

"You know," Xambria says as she glances at a diorama depicting Ancient dress, "they really didn't look like that. You all clearly don't know what you're dealing

with, so just give me what I want and none of you have to die."

As she attempted to steal the Ancient artifacts, the A-Team engaged her in hand to hand combat. The doctor was not herself, however, and a psionic being detached itself from her and pressed the assault as she regained her senses and shrieked in horror.



Xambria drops her weapon, falls to her knees, and screams. She yanks and tears off one of her leather sleeves, revealing three human eyes poking out of her skin. All these eyes twitch and look in every direction, then stare straight back at Xambria. She reels in horror for a moment, then shakes her head.

"That is bloody strange." She looks away from her mutated limb at the madness in the gala, as if seeing

it for the first time. Then she looks to you and leans forward, desperate. "Don't—don't kill me! I'm fighting it back. I can stop it. But cuff me, just in case. Lock me up—lock me up somewhere it can't escape. I know things it knew, and

that you need to know!"

Shortly after being bloodied, the creature fled, abandoning Dr Xambria to be dealt with by the constables.

## **The RHC Headquarters**

After Dr Xambria's Apprehension, A-Team acquiesced to Stover Delft's request that they take her immediately to the RHC HQ personally guard her until he can catch up. Whatever Stover Delft had been doing, he felt confident that now was the time to confront Lady Saxby with the evidence. While the constables waited for Delft to sneak back into the RHC HQ, they began interrogating Dr Xambria:

“So forgive me if this comes out a little non-chronolinearly; I think I've gone several shades of crazy. Getting everything out is more important than getting it clear. You might want to write some of this gibberish down.

“The thing in my head, its name is Sijhen. It's a Gidim. They're some sort of race from another world, and it was trapped behind the ziggurat's seal for thousands of years. Real lookers, from its memories.

“Do you know what brain tastes like? I'm not a fan. Imagine being brought by a friend you don't really like to the same restaurant that only serves—you know, never mind, you don't want to know. Never with my own mouth, thank you, though.

“It got out, got into me, made me forget. I'm still not sure what I don't remember, but it definitely was interested in the Obscurati. It only figured that name out later, after it ate old Mr. Bergeron's brain.

“You lot, you stopped Macbannin. He was with Bergeron. There are these cells, keep them all secret from each other. Only a few people at the top know how it all fits together, and Caius wasn't at the top. But the Obscurati—that's a long name. The Ob. Sounds less ominous. Ob.

“So the Ob, they want to find out all about the Ancients and these seals. Caius was paying for us to do that for them. He reported up. I think he had a spell put on him to keep anyone from finding out who 'up' was from him.

“Oh, and he's going to ride the train. Sijhen didn't care about that, because it's months from now, but I think it's important. Whoever is 'up' will be there.

“Sijhen kept opening these portals, but it could never go through. Something stopped it. Portals instead of trains, hmph. He's just like Catherine Romana. Even a madwoman can read the papers, you know.”

Sounds of commotion come faintly from the other end of the jail, beyond the common prisoner cells.

“Damn. There was something else I just remembered that was important, but it's going. It made me forget. Your boss! Your boss, Saxby has something it wants. Saxby wasn't up, wasn't down, but was sideways. She worked for Macbannin. You probably ought to deal with that.”

The commotion grows louder, and then follows a scream from some dying prisoner.

“Oh, I got it! Sijhen doesn't care about the train because it plans to leave, and bring an invasion back. It *planned* to get captured, and I'm not really in control. Oh, bloody—”

A sudden wave of extraplanar energy washes over you, pouring out of the stone walls to the south. You stagger at the sudden sense of dislocation, and as you struggle to regain your senses, every inanimate object around you not carried or worn turns impossibly translucent. You can see through stone, down to the sewer, out to the under-construction subrail tunnel, sideways to the band of black-clad murderers sneaking into the basement, up to the ground floor and all your equally confused coworkers.

And then the world turns transparent, nothing but contour lines and faded textures. The sight is too much for your mind to grasp, and vertigo drops you to your knees. But you do see one thing clearly. Xambria stands, jumps into the ceiling, digs her fingers into invisible handholds, and pulls herself up through solid stone to the ground floor.

Your vertigo passes, and the world has started to darken back to translucence, and further still to solidity. But you can feel another wave coming, and for a moment, when everything was transparent, you saw monsters flying through the building above.

Xambria-Sijhen confronted Lady Saxby and demanded that she turn over the Ancient star map so that Sijhen could perform the appropriate transportation ritual to open a portal to its home planet. When Saxby opened her office safe, she suddenly realized that someone had stolen it...

“No matter,” Sijhen snarled, “I can get the information I need another way.” And with that, he severed his possession on Dr Xambria's body, killing her in the process, but carrying her soul with him. Sijhen then grappled with Saxby, and quickly possessed her to search for the one memory he needed...

Meanwhile, as the A-Team recovered from the initial shock of the dimensional phasing, Damocles rushed to meet the attack squad that had infiltrated the basement, while Luxen and the gnome technologist rushed up the stairs to catch Xambria.

As the walls phased in and out, the technician seized the opportunity to raid the evidence room, and mounted a Nock Gun to a Steamsuit of armor while his simulacrum began loading all nine barrels. Luxen fought his way through several eldritch horrors that had stunned most of the office and rushed into Saxby's office just in time to witness Saxby become possessed by Sijhen.

As Luxen attacked Saxby in her attempt to flee, Inspector Carlao broke into the room to the sight of Xambria's dead body and Inspector Luxen attacking the Chief Inspectress. After a tense stand off, Luxen managed to convince Carlao to stand down, and frustrated, Sijhen abandoned Saxby to flee to the underground train station.

Meanwhile, in the basement, Damocles was surrounded in the darkness on all sides by four Obscurati assassins who poisoned the cleric and beat him within an inch of his life. Just as the shadow assassins moved to administer the final blow, Mourn arrived with Stover Delf, Rock Rackus, and the Conservator. After defeating the assassins, the party continued into the underground train station to stop Sijhen from making his extra-dimensional escape.

In an attempt to stall, Sijhen offered to return Mourn's beloved Ka'Serah back to her normal form, claiming that the relic that had transformed her was of Gidim origin, and that he could modify it easily. In exchange, all he wanted in return was for Mourn to stall A-Team until it could complete the teleportation ritual. In a moment of conflict, Mourn pondered his choices, but ultimately decided to remain true to his comrades, and instead fought against the creature. With few options remaining, Sijhen then offered to spare the soul of Dr Xambria by transferring it to a host willing to share a body with her.

Damocles volunteered, and true to its word, Sijhen bonded Meredith's soul to the cleric spiritualist's consciousness. Simultaneously, the creature tore open a rift, and out came a Gargantuan tentacle Wurm-Maw. The battle immediately looked bleak, until the gnome stomped into position with the stolen Steam Suit and unloaded all 9 barrels of the Nock Gun, exploding the monster's head in a mangled gore of shredded flesh and ooze (Nat 20, x4 crit modifier on 9 shots!).

But in the madness, Sijhen escaped as the portal closed, leaving the A-Team now with more questions than answers.