

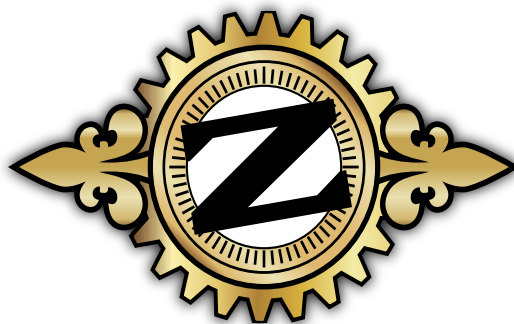


EN5ider Presents:

Schism

Part Two

A 5E-Compatible Adventure for 9th- to 10th-Level Characters



Act Two: Applied Eschatology

IN THIS ACT, THE PARTY HEADS north to a glacial rift controlled by frost giants loyal to the Obscurati, where they must reach a frozen lich and trade Leone's soul for Grappa's aid.

Witnesses and the Obscurati.

The fight with Leone probably has a large audience. If people see the party knock out Leone, will word get back to the Obscurati? Probably. But if the party follows through with Grappa's plan, their original bodies will end up effectively dead. The Ob will perform divinations, and they almost certainly know the PCs' names, but the magic will verify that they're dead. So when "Leone" shows up alive and well, and brief magical checks show that he's not being mind-controlled, they'll accept his story that he managed to escape the party and kill them.



Mind to Bargain

Social. Real-Time.

Alexander Grappa explains his insane plan.

Once Leone finally falls asleep, Alexander Grappa slowly takes control of the man's body. He struggles a bit to talk, since until now he hasn't tried speaking in Leone's body, but he gets the hang of it after a few minutes of slurring and stammering. He can move just fine now, but warns them that any sudden jolt could wake Leone, and that he's completely unable to fight for dominance when the man is conscious.

Grappa thanks them, then gets down to business and explains his plan. He discovered toward the end of his time with his previous employers that they were working with a group of frost giants based in the tower city of Knütpara, trapped over a thousand years ago in a massive glacier. He only managed a bit of investigation of his own, but he learned there was an unnamed frost giant lich whose phylactery was lost in that city, and that the last time he was destroyed a few centuries ago, he apparently reformed stuck in the ice.

The lich's specialty was ripping souls out of people and planting other souls into the shells of their bodies, mostly as a service for allies of the Demonocracy, to let them be immortal, or so that they could infiltrate groups opposed to the demons. It was apparently quite effective, and could even fool magical detection. Grappa theorized that his former employers were trying to free the lich, but

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SPECIAL THANKS TO
to everyone who made *Final Fantasy VI*, since it has been pointed out to me that we sure seem to have a lot of similarities to that game (clearly we need a talking octopus); to the hundreds of gamers who backed the original release of ZEITGEIST on Kickstarter; and to the over one thousand generous patrons of EN World EN5IDER whose support has made this Fifth Edition update possible.

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before sending his letter to the constables, he performed a divination and learned that the lich is still trapped in the ice. The other frost giants found him, but apparently haven't dug him out yet.

Grappa risked only two *sending* spells while trapped in Leone's body. The first was to contact Tinker Oddcog (see Adventure Six, *Revelations from the Mouth of a Madman*). The second was to ask if the lich would share his knowledge of soul transfer, and it agreed, on the condition that he free it.

"Do not doubt my intentions," Grappa says at this point. "We shall definitely destroy him once we get what we want. I'd hate to loose some ancient evil being on the world."

Moral Objections.

Grappa has prepared dozens of possible arguments to convince uncomfortable PCs that this is the best solution. We suggest you ponder what might sway your players if you think they'll balk. In particular, Grappa says repeatedly that the Obscurati are cautious, and that there's no other way the party will be able to reach their secret meeting.

It will take place in the Bleak Gate, so it's not even possible to just get an army and attack the place. Sneaking in is the only way, and not doing this will let a far greater evil succeed, judging by what the conspiracy has done so far.

Grappa tries to keep his knowledge of the meeting secret so that the party has to work with him, but if they insist he share before they agree to help, he'll do it, all while pointing out that he's too decent a man to work in such a cutthroat business.

Lich Location, Ob Operation.

The city of Knütpara lies further north in the Shawl Mountains, about a three-day trek from Mirsk. Three towers still rise above the level of the glacier, and the frost giants have smashed through their walls to get access deeper into the glacier. A river has carved a rift in the glacier, and after several years of excavation, the giants have reached the chamber where the lich is trapped.

In truth, the giants want nothing to do with the lich, and they actively make sure he doesn't escape. Rather, this city was damned by Triegenes centuries ago, and flaming stones fell from the heavens to strike it down. The Obscurati enlisted the giants to recover those extraterrestrial rocks, which were over years picked up in the glacier. The Ob use these rocks to create oil infusions for the Wayfarer Lantern and its derivatives.

The glacier is also a test-bed of sorts for uses of the lantern. It was here that the Ob perfected different mixes of oils that can create different world states, and now they just use the lantern magic to smooth operations. The giants use slave labor – mostly dwarf and human prisoners sent north by Drakran authorities and sold off instead of making their way into normal prisons. They are kept docile by means of a series of lanterns burning the right mix of extraplanar oils.

The Ob researchers here aren't combatants, but the party will have their first taste of the pervasive mind-altering magic the conspiracy has in store for the whole world, and they'll have to be careful or else they'll be easy pickings for the giants.

Leone Complication.

The party will need to bring Leone along and keep him alive, unless they can spare enough time to leave him locked up, go clear the rift of threats, return, and then bring Leone to the lich. Along the way, the steelshaper will be unable to use his magic as long as the party keeps him in *mage cuffs*, but he'll look for many opportunities to escape or sabotage them, especially once they get into the rift where he has Obscurati allies.

Leone probably still doesn't know about Grappa, and he'll be confused why the party has taken him alive and are heading into a frozen wilderness. He starts off quiet, obedient, and observant, trying to get a gauge of the group. He might try to strike up a friendship with one PC in order to bargain for his life, or at the very least to make the party treat him like a human, making it harder to kill him. Plus, when the moment presents itself, he'll be ready to try to get them killed. We offer a few suggestions for ways he can cause trouble.

Into the North

Exploration. Montage.

The party must reach the glacier-trapped city of Knütpara while keeping Leone alive and in custody.

Knütpara lies about 20 miles north-east of Mirsk, but in the mountainous and icy terrain it's difficult to traverse more than 8 miles in a day. A well-prepared party is at little risk of dying on the way there (assume everyone is sheltered by enduring magic or at least warm coats), but Leone will try to escape if the party finds itself in a bad place.



Orienteering.

Each day, have one PC who takes the lead make a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (navigator's tools) to find the best route through the mountains, and a DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) check to guide the party safely through.

Then each PC – as well as Leone – must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw to cross the mountains safely (DC 10 if both checks succeeded, DC 15 if one was failed, and DC 18 if both failed). Each PC that fails the save falls prey to fatigue or distraction at the wrong moment and finds themselves in a perilous situation, such as clinging to an ice wall with a frayed rope and a broken ice axe, or caught in the path of a sudden avalanche. If multiple PCs fail, they're all imperiled at the same time.

Escaping Peril.

Whenever a perilous situation occurs, create a quick encounter where those who succeeded the save are in no immediate danger, but those who failed have at most 3 rounds before they plummet to their deaths.

Those who are imperiled might be able to escape with a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to leap or climb to safety, but if they fail by 5 or more they'll fall immediately. Those who are safe need to succeed a DC 15 check to lend assistance, but if they fail by 5 or more they'll end up imperiled too.

A character who fails or doesn't escape in time suffers some horrible injury from the fall, taking appropriate damage, reducing their speed by half, and making Constitution and Dexterity saving throws with disadvantage until the damage is healed and they have benefited from a long rest.

Sabotage

Should the party find itself imperiled, Leone feigns disinterest (Deception +12), but if he has a chance he'll try to bull rush someone off a cliff (Athletics +8, or +13 if the target is in metal armor), then make a run for it. If the party is doing pretty well and avoiding peril, on the third day Leone uses a sharp rock he has hidden away to slice a climbing rope, imperiling at least one PC.

His ideal escape plan is to knock someone with a fair amount of metal off a ledge, then levitate them telekinetically, taking damage from the mage cuffs. He'll shout that they need to take the cuffs off now or else he'll drop them. Even then, though, Leone's much weaker out on a tundra with no handy trains to use as weapons.

The Three Towers

Action. Real-Time.

The party must sneak past a patrol to enter the glacial rift and find the magic Grappa needs.

After three days the gaps between the mountains become choked with glaciers 100 feet thick or more. The party comes across centuries-old ruins of the pre-Clergy civilization, including, at the entrance to what was once the city's valley, a stone pillar carved with words in Abyssal. They read, "Gaze ye upon Knütpara, eternal bastion of the Demonocracy, built to withstand any army's siege."



Beyond lies a seemingly trackless glacier, obscured by snow drifts and hazy white winds.

Giant Territory.

Several thousand frost giants live along the mountains surrounding Knütpara, but only a handful venture down to the glacial rift. As long as the party doesn't look for trouble, the main body of the frost giants here won't bother them.

The giants who live at the glacial rift are led by the Khangitche, a warrior named **Odul Chuvan**. Under his command are 2 demonic death bears, 3 frost giant rangers, 3 frost giant mages, and 16 frost giant guards.

Normally these are divided into five groups:

1. **Patrol.** 2 rangers, 2 bears. They head out to find the party once they breach the perimeter.
2. **Surface Tents.** Frost mage, 4 guards. They might spot the party approaching the towers, and they respond to the sound of combat from below. They can descend to sub-level 1 through a shaft in the ice with giant-sized handholds.



3. **Rift Defenses.** 5 guards. They are scattered around the different areas of the rift, walking the same routes over and over again, stopping every fifteen minutes or so to chat with someone when their paths cross. They each have a whistle to blow in case of attack. (Not a horn; they don't want to risk an avalanche.)
4. **Reserves.** Frost mage, ranger, 3 guards. They rest in area O, and only come out if the alarm is sounded.
5. **Mine.** Odul Chuvan, frost mage, 4 guards. The khangitche oversees a few dozen prisoners as they dig out the ice looking for meteorites.

Additionally, two Obscurati wizards reside in area M, and they are responsible for maintaining the test lanterns and recording the results of their experiments on the prisoners.

The Approach.

The surface of the glacier is dotted with small totems, spaced every few hundred feet. These consist of dwarf, human, and animal skulls, with frozen red entrails dribbling from their mouths. The frost giant rangers that patrol the glacier are accompanied by hideous demonic creatures, seemingly immortal beasts they call "death bears." They have no skin of their own, so the giants let them wear polar bear pelts, and the only way to kill them for good is to make sure their bodies cannot lie in a pool of blood. Additionally, they have a preternatural sense that alerts them whenever a living creature gets within 10 feet of any of their totems.

The rift itself is easy to find, simply by following the only stream that manages to flow across the glacier. Though aligned just right to be warmed above freezing by the sun during the day, it dies each night. If the party follows the riverbed it has carved, they find totems lining each side, which easily alert the death bears. Two of the rangers take the beasts to check out what is approaching.

Enemies.

- 2 Knütpara frost giant rangers*
- 2 demonic death bears*

* The stats for these enemies are listed in Part Three (Appendix).

Sneaking.

The frost giants are large and can be spotted from several hundred feet away with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Sneaking past them is impossible unless the party consciously avoids the totems. Even then, they must each first succeed on DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) checks to get within sight of the towers without being found by the rangers. They can move to the two north towers (Areas A or B) without being spotted, but those towers have no easy entrance. Getting to the entrance of the south tower (Area C) requires sneaking past the frost giant surface camp with a successful DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check.

Moving through the rift without being spotted by the guard patrols can be done with a DC 18 Dexterity (Stealth) check. Sneaking within 50 feet of the rangers out on the glacier surface is harder (DC 21), while entering the surface camp and descending the shaft is incredibly risky (DC 25).

A single failed check simply raises the suspicion of the enemies present; they'll take actions to investigate, but usually the adven-

turers have a couple rounds to find a hiding place. Give PCs a bonus to their second Dexterity (Stealth) check if they suggest a good hiding spot or make use of another skill or ability to aid their evasion. A second failed check while a giant is investigating means the PC has been spotted, and combat will almost certainly ensue.

More Sabotage.

The party might want to gag Leone, or even better wait until the man falls asleep and Grappa can take over.

Once Leone realizes where they are, he'll wait for a chance to spoil the group's stealth, shouting out that he's one of their allies, while the party is here to kill them. He knows there's an Ob operation here, but he has no idea what they work on. One way he can alert the giants without the party realizing is if he uses his steelshaping to tug a giant's weapon, making it suspicious. Leone will take damage, so he can only do this once or twice.

The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Khangitche

Action. Tactical.

The party makes its way to the bottom of the rift.

Here we detail the locations of the rift. Stats of the enemies guarding it are listed in Part Three (Appendix).

Terrain.

Most areas are scattered with patches of thick snow drifts (difficult terrain) or ice that requires a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (the DC of this check is 8 + 1 per icy square the creature enters on its turn) to avoid falling prone.

Climbing along the icy walls requires a DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check but is made much easier with an ice axe or similar implement (an appropriate implement grants advantage).

A character who falls into icy water must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 1d6 cold damage and suffer from hypothermia (treat as one level of exhaustion). The character makes another save each hour that their clothes remain wet. Characters who are resistant to cold damage, or who have magical protection from cold weather, can ignore this.

A. Overlook Tower.

This 140-foot high tower sits at the very edge of the glacier and it overlooks an icy gorge. Likely many dangerous and wonderful dungeons and tombs lie in the caves that branch off from the gorge, but those are beyond the scope of this adventure. The gorge extends a few hundred feet, beyond which the glacier continues.

There is no entrance to this tower at this level. The windows are barred and iced over. Stairways – sized for dwarves, not giants – spiral up to the roof and down to the sub-level one. This tower was once a torture prison for enemies of the Demonocracy. The old furniture (racks, vices, hooks and chains) have been pushed to the edges of the room.

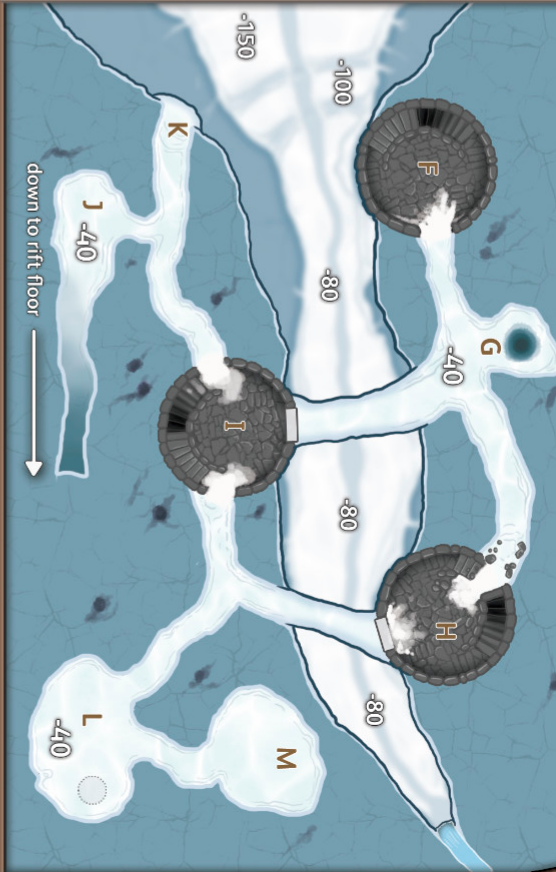
When he's not overseeing the mine, Odul Chuvan stays here with two of the female guards, who are his consorts. A massive bear-skin bed covers the middle of the floor.



Spires of Knüttara



Sub-Level One (-40 ft.)



Rift Floor (-80 ft.)





B. Dragon Tower.

Carved stone dragons adorn this building's walls. The tower was a breeding aerie for dragons used as aerial cavalry by the Demonocracy, and ancient cracked eggshells and discarded teeth have been swept to the walls. A search of the top floor with a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers a steel-bound book on techniques of dragon breeding and rearing.

When not needed in the mine, one frost mage and one guard live here.

C. Ink and Elm.

This solid black tower once had a crown of branches like an elm tree. Most of them have snapped off. The handful that remain have been decorated by Odul Chuvan, who likes to throw prisoners and see if he can stick them on the stone spikes.

This used to be the frost giant's main route down into the rift, but now it's mostly just used by the rangers so they can bring out their pet deathbears. The walls inside are scrawled with graffiti in charcoal and bloody smears. This tower is the only one with an entryway at the surface level: a door smashed through its wall, with only a stitched-together bear-hide curtain to keep out the snow.

D. Waterfall.

The small stream that crosses the glacier drops eighty feet here into a 10-foot deep pool at the bottom of the rift.

E. Surface Camp.

- 1 frost giant mage
- 4 frost giant guards

Three huge tents sit inside a circular fraise of ice spikes. A frost mage lives in one tent, and four guards are split between the other two tents. A shaft descends 25 feet to Area L, and then there's a 15 foot drop to the ice cave.

F. Outlook Tower, Middle Level.

The frost giants smashed a hole in the wall here, and knocked out parts of the ceiling to get more space. Occasionally pairs of giants use this spot for a private rendezvous. Frozen elk-intestine condoms lie discarded or stuck proudly to the icy walls. Stairs lead up and down from here.

G. The Chute.

- 1 frost giant guard

This shaft descends 15 feet, after which there is a 15-foot drop to Area O. The giants prefer to use this route now, rather than go through the lantern-enchanted gorge floor. South of the chute, the tunnel opens into the rift, and a 25-foot thick ice bridge crosses the 60-foot gap to Area I.

H. Dragon Tower, Middle Level.

- 1 frost giant guard

An actual door here (20 feet tall, red steel, free from ice) leads out to an ice bridge, but it was originally used exclusively by dragons. The frost giants also smashed out a wall on the other side, and they use it as their kitchen.

Mood Lighting.

The bottom of the rift (Area S) has *wayfarer's lanterns* spaced every 40 feet, hung from ice hooks. They dimly illuminate the entire bottom of the rift in a soothing blue light. Similarly, the prison mine (Area V) is lit by lanterns that shed piercing red light, which invigorate those nearby.

Whenever a creature approaches one of these lanterns, it might be affected by whatever planar energy it is manifesting.

Lantern's Manifestation

Whenever a creature ends its turn within 25 feet of a *wayfarer's lantern* (50 feet for a large lantern), it must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or fall under the lantern's effect. An affected creature gets a new save each round, but if a creature fails three consecutive saves, it falls fully under the lantern's effect for 5 minutes.

If a creature successfully ends three consecutive turns unaffected, it becomes resistant, and cannot be affected again by any lantern with the same planar energy for 5 minutes.

A creature can choose to let itself be affected by the lantern.

The lanterns in Area S **pacify**. A creature affected by this magic cannot take hostile actions and treats all creatures as trusted friends. If another creature attacks it, it breaks free of the pacification and cannot be affected again until the end of the encounter.

The lanterns in Area V **invigorate**. Creatures affected gain a +2 bonus to Strength and Constitution ability checks, and to weapon attack rolls. They take a -2 penalty to spell attack rolls.

Breaking Lanterns.

The lanterns here are as easy to break as nonmagical lanterns.

Persistence and Resistance.

A creature who knows what the lanterns do can choose to actively to resist their effects. On its turn it can spend an action to focus on maintaining its state of mind, gaining advantage and a +2 bonus on its saving throw to resist the lantern.

Once Grappa is in control of Leone's body, it might help to have him examine one of the lanterns and explain to the party how they can resist such magic in the future.

Anyone who opens the door from either side triggers a blast of fire (15-foot radius burst, 5d6 fire damage, DC 18 Dexterity saving throw for half).

I. Ink and Elm, Middle Level.

The door to the north here is framed by carved stone signs inviting (in Abyssal) guests to enjoy the finest food and parties of the north. A careful search inside can uncover a bottle of 1,000 year old wine, frozen solid. It's disgusting.

J. Meteor Storage.

- 1 frost giant guard

Thornsenkertz, one of the Obscurati researchers, cheekily made a snowman here and placed bits of unneeded rocks in the wall to spell out, "METEOR STORAGE."

A sled is loaded with four dozen clay jars, each filled with meteors from different extraplanar locations.



K. Pissing Point.

The frost giants use this spot as a latrine by letting their waste freeze and then throwing it off into the rift. The Ob researchers actually set up a small igloo for privacy here.

L. Giant's Ballroom.

- 1 frost giant guard

This is the giant's primary method of ingress these days.

M. Obscurati Research.

This chamber has been subdivided with wooden poles and animal-hide curtains, splitting it into lodging, laboratory, and living room. The researchers keep a tiny replica of the original *Wayfarer's Lantern* burning oil from the plane of air, Avilona, which somehow keeps the room at a comfortable temperature without melting the ice walls.

The two 30-something researchers here, a man named **Gangenwieck** and a woman named **Thornsenkertz**, were recruited from minor border states. They've gotten quite fond of creatively grumbling about the living conditions (an "insect collection" board where the pins all hold giant-endemic body lice; an ironic "visitors' guide" brochure extolling the virtues of all the giants they loathe, plus recipes for ice soup and ice soufflé; a log book next to a chess board, with 8 solid pages marking the date and a single move per person, with all the moves just going back and forth between two positions to no advantage; etc.).

Their laboratory has extensive notes on nearly 50 planes from which different meteors originated, and the effects they had on the prisoners. Their method of observation was to place a lantern outside one of the cells in Area U, light it from afar, and observe with a telescope.

N. Outlook Tower, Ground Level.

The bottom of the tower is thick with ice, leaving very little navigable space. A few dwarf skeletons can be found here: slaves who escaped and hid somewhere the giants couldn't reach them, but from which they couldn't sneak out.

O. Main Quarters.

- 1 frost giant mage
- 1 frost giant ranger
- 3 frost giant guards

The frost giants take shifts resting in this room on pelt beds. They use an old banquet table for repairing clothes and boots, and have a metal tray in one corner filled with bloody snow they munch on for snacks.

P. Dragon Tower, Ground Level.

The frost mages cleared this area of the stones that were once different floors, and now they use it as a meditation site. The ice that coats the walls is etched with thousands of runes.

Q. Ink and Elm, Ground Level.

Here the giants keep a haphazard collection of treasure looted from the city. Most of it is just shiny brass – doorknobs, sconces, and the like – but underneath a layer of ice and a pile of cheap

metal, a few prizes wait, like a 10-foot diameter solid gold chandelier or a mahogany headboard decorated with rubies. The party can also find here Reason, +3 diplomatic rifle (see Part Three, Appendix), its stock carved out of a demonic thigh bone, originally crafted by a familiar dwarf mercenary, **Kvarti Gorbatiy** (see Area U).

R. Second Waterfall.

The waterfall river flows west and into the gorge past the tower. The movement of the glacier has actually torn the towers from their original foundations, which is easily noticed here.

S. Rift Floor.

The ground here is perilously icy and sloped. Whenever a creature walks here, at the end of each move action it must make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (DC 8 + 1 per square traveled) or else it falls prone and slides 1 square toward the frigid stream.

The lanterns here try to pacify creatures. See Mood Lighting (page 7).

T. Waterfall Pool.

The water here is 10 feet deep. Subtle runes carved into the edge of the pool can be noticed with a DC 26 Wisdom (Perception) check. These have enchanted the water so that any creature that enters it has any magical cold protection suppressed for 1 hour.

A character who tries to climb along the wall must make a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid the waterfall. Failure means the character is knocked into the water.

U. Prison Cells.

- 1 frost giant guard

The five cells along this ledge have ice bars thick enough that the exhausted dwarf and human prisoners within haven't yet managed to break through them. Even when they get close, the frost giant mages repair the damage. A total of 32 prisoners (13 humans, 19 dwarves) stay here, including **Kvarti Gorbatiy**.

The dwarf mercenary used to plunder this city for treasure, and long ago he crafted a rifle using the thigh bone of the lich here as a stock. His interest in the Obscurati was piqued during Adventure Five, *Cauldron-Born*, and when he learned that frost giants were operating in his old stomping ground he came to check it out and got captured. His rifle was taken as a trophy.

V. Prison Mine.

- Odul Chuvan
- 1 frost giant mage
- 4 frost giant guards

During the day, the prisoners work in two 8 hour shifts of 16 people apiece. They head down the tunnel into the mine tunnels (Area W), hack into the glacial ice with picks, and then cart the pieces up to the pool here, where they slowly melt in the lantern light. The giants recover any meteorites in the bottom of the pool, and the water runs down to the drain (Area X).

The lanterns here try to invigorate creatures. See Mood Lighting (page 7).

For details of this location, see *Frozen Souls*, below.



W. Mine Tunnels.

The prisoners work down this shaft, which leads to several tunnels. The tunnels are just large enough for a giant to walk through, and at least one giant is with the miners at any time, holding a lantern to keep them invigorated. The tunnels are fairly orderly and boring. The prisoners usually only find a handful of meteorites each day, and they're seldom larger than a thimble.

X. Lich Drain.

In their excavation, the giants found a figure frozen in the ice: a giant lich from the time of the Demonocracy. On the Obscurati's orders they did not dig him out, but his magic subtly influenced the water flow from the melt pool in area V, causing it to flow past him. The giants responded by digging a drainage hole right in front of the lich, so any warm water would not manage to thaw out his prison.

For details of this location, see Frozen Souls, below.

Winter Cell

Social. Real-Time.

An Obscurati cell collaborates with the frost giants, performing mind-control experiments.

Gangenwieck (male) and Thornsengkertz (female), the two Ob scientists still active here, are not true believers. They don't know the conspiracy's larger plans, and they just think they're researching some magical weapons that have fringe uses for crowd control. They are in no way combatants, but they're intelligent, and will try to use the lanterns in Area S to their advantage.

If confronted, they'll claim they hate working here and will confess to most everything: they're working with some conspiracy that they think is based out of Trekhom, prisoners get sent here to work for the giants digging up meteorites which they infuse into lantern oil, and they've done some experiments with it. But they lie about the lanterns at the bottom of the rift, saying that their purpose is to "establish a kinetostatic inertial field to stabilize the glacial flow in the rift; basically, it keeps the rift from collapsing."

The technobabble helps sell the lie – which can be seen through with a successful DC 26 Wisdom (Insight) check – but a character who studied the lantern's schematics has advantage, and anyone who studies the energy of the lanterns from afar with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes they have an enchantment aura, not telekinetic.

Friendly Villains.

Regardless whether they're found out, the two scientists gladly give full details of the rest of the rift, and they suggest the party head down to the rift floor, kill the Khangitche, and free the prisoners. They hope the party will head down without them; they'll try to watch from one of the ice bridges over the rift, and once the party is in the pacifying lantern light, they'll order them to wait for the Khangitche to arrive so everyone can talk about the situation reasonably. And to make sure the giants aren't too scared, the scientists add, why not drop your weapons and spell components, and stay there politely?

If somehow this works (and remember that failing to break free

Xambria and Soul Searching.

If one of the PCs has had the consciousness of Xambria Meredith stuck in his head since Adventure Three, *Digging for Lies*, she points out that if the lich can give Grappa a body, maybe he can do the same for her. It just requires the party to find someone whose soul they're willing to rip out. If the party is about to kill someone anyway, Xambria suggests not letting a good living body go to waste.

Xambria would prefer a woman's body, all things considered. She'd be content with Thornsengkertz, though she'll lament that she didn't have more time to take her pick of the healthiest female villains.

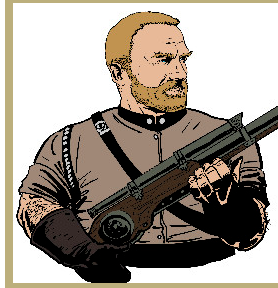
Likewise, if a player has been interested in changing something about his or her character, like class or skills, the lich could perform a little bit of soul surgery.

for 3 consecutive rounds makes the effect last for 5 minutes), the two scientists play a quick game of rock-paper-scissors that results in Gangenwieck having to go through the freezing waterfall to alert the Khangitche. Since the Ob scientists understand how the lanterns work, they concoct a plan that can kill the party.

Rules Lawyering.

A few minutes later, the frost giant mage from Area V comes out of the waterfall. He is surprisingly friendly, but says that his master gave him an errand to run before negotiations can start. Then he walks out of the rift and up to one of the ice bridges overhead. From there he calls down and asks, politely, for the party to step under the bridge, and stay there so he can show them something exciting. When they do, the mage uses *ice shaping* to remove one end of the bridge. The other end begins to crack, and one round later the whole bridge collapses, dropping several tons of ice on the party.

Give each PC a saving throw to break out of the pacification effect. Those who succeed can act to get out of the way, but those who fail obediently wait to see the exciting thing. Anyone still left in the same spot one round later might be crushed (18d6 bludgeoning damage, DC 22 Dexterity saving throw for half.)



Kvarti Gorbatiy. A dwarven locksmith turned mercenary, Kvarti found a book of Heid Eschatol philosophy in the hands of a man he had assassinated. Though he presents a weary face to maintain his reputation, he tries to go through life content. All his affairs are in order, and recently he set himself on what he thought was the

noble cause of trying to learn more about the people behind the colossus. He would have been fine dying on his mission, but after being captured and tortured by the frost giants of Knütpara, he realizes he wasn't prepared for being powerless.





Frozen Souls

Action. Tactical.

The frozen lich who can free Grappa and help the party infiltrate the Ob lies in a heavily guarded mine filled with prisoners.

Odul Chuvan and some of his giants wait in Area V while 16 prisoners work in the mine, under the watch of one giant guard. The Khangitche is not much of a talker, but he can be intimidated into just leaving if the party explains that they've killed the rest of his forces.

Adversaries.

- Khangitche Odul Chuvan
- 1 frost giant mage
- 4 frost giant guards

Approach.

The ledge overhead has prison cells, and unless the party calms the prisoners down their excitement at a possible rescue will alert the giants. Kvarti Gorbatiy is in his cell when the party arrives, and he'll whisper an explanation of the situation, how he got here, and what the lanterns below do. He's heard the giants discussing a frozen wizard who must be down the tunnel to the southwest, but he's never seen it.

He's the only prisoner worth much in a fight, and if the party gives him a gun he can provide overwatch.

Tactics.

If a fight breaks out, the giant in the mines orders the prisoners back into the main area immediately. They arrive at the start of the second round, first 4 humans, then the frost giant guard, then a dozen humans behind him.

If the party is still up on the ledge the frost giant mage tries to use ice shaping to turn the ground beneath some of the adventurers into a ramp, dropping them into close combat. The giant guards then rush any PCs who are farther away, trying to keep the groups split up.

Odul Chuvan grabs chunks of ice to throw at the adventurers before closing, then tries to throw PCs into the gully on the western side of the room. When he drops below half hit points he calls his guards back to him to form a protective ring, but he doesn't run.

Loot.

When Odul Chuvan falls, his armor seems to melt away, leaving behind just one chunk of ice that radiates magic. This is a suit of +1 full plate that grants its wearer resistance to cold damage.

Aftermath.

There's the very real logistical problem of getting the prisoners to safety. If none in the party can use teleport, they might cast sending to contact Laurnyn Cyneburg, who can teleport to Mirsk and hike here in a few days. Kvarti is willing to stay and keep everyone safe; there's enough supplies to last that long, at least.

Which leaves the issue of why they came here in the first place.

Kvarti Gorbatiy

Medium humanoid (hill dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 170 (20d8+80)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws DEX +8, CON +7

Skills Intimidation +8, History +3, Insight +10, Perception +10, Stealth +12

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Primordial

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Deft Shooter. A ranged weapon deals one extra die of damage when Kvarti hits with it (included in the attack).

Dwarven Resilience. Kvarti has advantage on saving throws against poison.

Feat: Superb Aim. Kvarti ignores half cover and three-quarters cover when making a ranged weapon attack, and he doesn't have disadvantage when attacking at long range. When Kvarti makes his first ranged weapon attack in a turn, he can choose to take a -5 penalty to his ranged weapon attack rolls in exchange for a +10 bonus to ranged weapon damage.

Targeting Shot. Kvarti can use a bonus action to aim at a target within 80 feet, gaining advantage on his next attack roll against it before the end of his turn. On a hit, he deals an extra 18 (4d8) damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kvarti fires his rifle twice.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4+4) piercing damage or 9 (2d4+4) piercing damage when thrown.

Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 80/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d10+4) piercing damage.

The Leone, The Lich, and the Snowglobe

Social. Real-Time.

The frost giant lich makes a bargain.

In Area X, the lich's towering body (easily 18 feet tall) is visible through more than a foot of ice. When the group is ready, someone can place a hand on the ice. The lich's eyes glow with white light, and the glacier shudders as its muffled voice seems to come from all directions. It is a man of few words, and asks what they have come for.

The party should explain their needs here (or Grappa can, if Leone's asleep). First, they need to remove Leone's soul from his body so Grappa can control it. Second, they need to learn the magic that can implant their souls into other people's bodies.

The undead mage is a man of few words, and demands that after he gives the group the knowledge it needs, they must break the ice trapping him and let him go free. He promises not to harm them. If they do not free him, he will curse them to turn their blood to



ice. Anyone remotely familiar with the Demonocracy should have a good sense that such curses were well within the power of those who served the demons.

Feel free to play up the lich as much as you want – it has all these hideous plans to march into the frozen wastes and awaken the Lost Riders who will sweep across the land carving out a new domain for him to rule over, etc. etc. – but the truth is that the lich isn't making it out of here.

Soul Ripping.

Even if Grappa is in control, Leone starts to panic now and tries to run. The lich tells the group that it needs a crystal to hold the man's soul. A glass sphere is best, but a piece of ice will work. It tells them to press the victim to the ice wall, place the crystal on the back of his head, and name the person whose soul is to be removed.

When they say Leone's name the entire glacier shakes, and the ice around them turns black. Cracks fissure the walls and Leone screams, flails, tries to shove the party away with his steelshaping even to the point of searing the flesh beneath his manacles. Then he goes limp, and the glacier becomes still and blue again, but the crystal has turned black.

Grappa groans, bonks his head a few times to clear it, then smiles to the party and thanks them. The party could keep Leone's soul in the crystal, but Grappa suggests breaking the crystal to let him pass on to whatever afterlife awaits him (if they use ice, it would melt eventually anyway.)

Henceforth, Grappa can use all of Leone's powers. Additionally he has some mild enchantment and charm magic that aren't pertinent in combat. He can also access a fair number of Leone's memories, but their geases are both still in effect. Grappa can play a convincing Leone, but he cannot tell the party that Roland Stanfield is part of the Ob, for instance.

Demonic Techniques.

Now the lich says he shall grant them the knowledge they asked for. Any arcane spellcaster can learn the spell mortal possession. All they need to do is place their hand on the ice and let the lich implant the knowledge in their mind. The spell is detailed in Player Handout – Obscurati Covers (in Part Three, Appendix).

Releasing the Lich.

His part of the bargain done, the lich tells them to free him. If they don't, he curses at them, discovering that he actually does not have the power he thought he did.

If they do – either by melting the ice or shattering it – the lich laughs and boasts that he will offer them a place in his future domain, once he has had his revenge...and then his jaw falls off. Confused, he manages to push himself free of the ice and take a single step, at which point his leg snaps in two. He faceplants, then shatters into thousands of icy shards. The various pieces fall down the pit and are washed away.

The Demonocracy is gone, and the Ob already found and destroyed the lich's phylactery. Without their support, the lich is just a normal undead with a very brittle corpse.

The Fitting Room

Social. Montage.

The party must decide whether to take Grappa's offer, and which Ob officer each of them wants to inhabit.

Assuming the party is willing to place their souls in the bodies of others, now all they have to do is wait for the officers to arrive. From Autumn 72 to Autumn 74 Leone's operatives will bring the arrivals in one by one to his hotel suite. Grappa can get them alone then magically waylay them.

For the sake of avoiding a causality glitch, you might want to just gloss through this and simply make each player use the same Obscurati Officer they played in the teaser. For now just give them the Officer Cards from the teaser, not the full bios.

Once everyone has a new body, they have to figure out what to do with their original ones. Grappa can get special potions able to

Vile Ritual.

One of the PCs can cast the *mortal possession* spell, but Grappa's probably best equipped to use it. An expert at mind magic, with the aid of some other spells he can force the victims to effectively make a DC 25 saving throw when he casts the spell. Their Wisdom save bonuses are listed below; they will automatically fail unless they roll a natural 20.

Contest, Crisis, and Rejection.

From time to time the PCs will have to make Wisdom saving throws to see if a host temporarily regains control of his body. Some hosts are more mentally resilient than others. Their saving throw DCs for this situation, known as a contest, are listed here, as well as their own Wisdom save bonus for when the party casts the spell on them.

- ♦ **Ken Don.** DC 14, wis +8.
- ♦ **Gran Guiscard.** DC 12, wis +4.
- ♦ **Livia Hatsfield.** DC 12*, wis +4.
- ♦ **Kiov Hetman.** DC 11, wis +3.
- ♦ **Oscan Ligurio.** DC 10, wis -2.
- ♦ **Bruce McDruid.** DC 10, wis +3.
- ♦ **Xavier Sangria.** DC 10, wis +5.

* *Note:* Livia is actually loyal to Risur, acting as a "double agent" without any affiliation with the RHC. If a character allows Livia to have control and then has the rest of the party explain the situation, it will become possible to maintain gestalt with her permanently.

If a contest leads to a crisis, give players a chance to play it off if anyone sees them acting strangely, though onlookers will probably report their suspicions to Nicodemus. If a full-blown rejection occurs, it's up to the GM how punitive to be. Perhaps the confused host stumbles into the rest of the party, who have a chance to tackle him before anyone else sees. Or perhaps he panics and starts screaming when he sees ghosts hovering outside his window.

If Nicodemus sees a PC in rejection, he'll have a basic idea of what the magic does, even if he doesn't know how it works. He'll quickly try to round up everyone else who came in the same group (i.e., the PCs, Grappa, and a few priests from Crisillyir), and will start asking very prying questions, forcing PCs to either lie convincingly or risk a gestalt attempt. Luckily, with Grappa around they're at no risk of a crisis, but they might not realize that.



keep the party's bodies from dying of hunger and thirst, and El Extraño's kobolds can watch over them in the hotel room. Or if the party has Copperhat the Headless's absurdist web, they can carry their bodies with them.

Rehearsal.

Show the group the first part of **Player Handout – Obscurati Covers**, and let them become familiar with the rules for contests, crises, and gestalt. Then it's time for each of them to attempt their first gestalt, to get a sense of their cover story and the personality they need to maintain.

One by one, have the players go through the process of contest (a few times if necessary), and then once they achieve gestalt give them the full character bio of their host body. Then watch the constable in Oscan Ligurio be creeped out, and let the party figure out what to do with Livia when they realize she's actually on their side.

Buddy System.

For the trip to Vendricce, Grappa can stay by the PCs and make sure when they sleep that they don't suffer a crisis. But once they reach the convocation, it'll be up to them to stay out of trouble and maintain their cover. Grappa suggests they request rooms so that at least two of them are in each room. That way in case one has a crisis while falling asleep the other can handle it.

With all that covered, it's time for the party to infiltrate the conspiracy. The group boards a train on Autumn 75 and over the next three days makes their way to Vendricce. There, around noon on Autumn 79, they board the ship *Naphaeon* along with a few priests of the Clergy, and they sail twenty miles off the coast.

Act Three: Into the Lion's Den

IN THIS ACT, THE PARTY HAS a chance to devastate the conspiracy, but a misstep could spell their doom.

Obscurati Palace Overview

Here we detail the locations of the Obscurati palace. Statistics for the enemies present here are listed in Appendix Two: Obscurati Forces (see Part Three, Appendix).

The total catalog of all the defenders of the palace and its surroundings are:

- ▶ 36 Obscurati bookpin guards
- ▶ 16 Obscurati arcane marksmen
- ▶ 3 shadowlisks
- ▶ 4 senior ghost councilors

Other combatants here include:

- ▶ 1 ghost council swarm
- ▶ Vicemi Terio
- ▶ Catherine Romana
- ▶ Cula Ravjahani

The other Ob officers aren't viable threats to the party at this point. Nicodemus the Gnostic could probably wipe the floor with all of them, but Andrei von Recklinghausen, whose body he is wearing, would stop him if he knows it's the same PCs he encountered on the railroad, forcing Nicodemus to flee rather than fight.

Obscurati Palace Locations

Mutravir Island, Exterior.

In the Bleak Gate, during the day everything is dimly lit, and at night it is pitch black. No breeze blows, and even the sea is eerily still. The island has been cleared of any sort of monster, though the waters around it are still host to the ghosts of a crew of pirates who dared to set foot on the island 50 years ago. They were captured by the Clergy and chained in their ship, which was set on fire. They burned alive and then sank into the sea. Only a young cabin boy managed to escape, swimming from the burning ship to Cacciatrecc de Nav (Area J), where he crawled into a cave and died of his wounds.

A. Garden

- 8 Obscurati bookpin guards
- 4 Obscurati arcane marksmen
- 2 shadowlisks

A gravel path circles a reflecting pool, and small wayfarer's lanterns glow with nourishing light, keeping alive rows of flowers and other greenery. The grass and trees elsewhere on the Bleak Gate version of the island are dry and lifeless, but the Obscurati see this garden as proof that they can change the world for the better.

The defenders listed above are split into two groups. Normally these guards patrol the path around the palace, each group making a circuit every 12 minutes, so guards pass by any given area every 6 minutes. Each group is the equivalent of a CR 14 encounter. (Darkvision, Perception +10. Shadowlisk pierces illusions.)

B. Obscurati Palace — Central Building.

- 4 Obscurati bookpin guards
- 2 senior ghost councilors

Pristine white plaster at ground level gives way to dramatic religious carvings near the roof, which peaks at 55 feet above the ground. The clay tiles of the roof gently slope, though without rain the gargoyles (actual stone carvings, not the monsters) are somewhat useless in the Bleak Gate.

Two large windows sit on either side of the entrance at ground level, while a row of windows spans the entire face of the second floor, 15 feet up.

A small detachment of guards keep watch at the entrance. (Perception +8.)

At any given time two senior ghost councilors will be assigned the task of strolling through the central building, on the look-out for trouble. If they spot any, they rush to alert Vicemi Terio and the rest of the ghost council, who will respond appropriately. (Darkvision, Perception +17.)

C. Obscurati Palace — West Wing.

- 1 senior ghost councilor
- 1 shadowlisk

The roof here peaks at only 40 feet above ground. Small chimneys dot the rooftop. Sixteen windows on each floor are nearly all unlit from within. This hall has few guests, at least not living ones.

At any given time, one senior ghost councilor walks the halls, accompanied by a shadowlisk, to make sure no one tries to sneak in. (Darkvision, Perception +10. Shadowlisk pierces illusions.)

D. Obscurati Palace — East Wing.

- 4 Obscurati Bookpin Guards

Identical to the west wing, except that here most of the windows will have lights on during waking hours. Two pairs of bookpin guards make slow circuits of the wing.

E. Lighthouse.

- 2 Obscurati arcane marksmen
- 1 senior ghost councilor

A recent addition to the palace, the lighthouse serves as a giant wayfarer's lantern. With a minute's preparation, oil of different combinations can be lit, producing either a coherent beam that can be aimed up to 3 miles away, or a broad glow that illuminates the entire island and the sea out to a half mile. This can create various magical effects, but it is primarily primed to be able to make the island coterminous between the Bleak Gate and the real world, in case an emergency evacuation is needed.





The lighthouse also has a mechanism that can feed different varieties of gas to the lanterns in different parts of the palace. Since all the mansion's gaslamps can function as wayfarer's lanterns, this allows an operator here to affect different parts of the palace with different types of planar energy.

The top floor of the lighthouse rises 100 feet above ground level (and a further 40 feet above sea level). It is serviced by two interior freight elevators. About sixty feet up is a large storage area that has tanks of gas with different planar energies, as well as precisely labeled casks of lantern oil, one for each of the five factions' proposals (Arboretum, Colossus, Miller's Pyre, Panarchists, and Watchmakers; see *Into the Night*, page 24). Clever parties might steal some of this oil and use it in a lamp of their own, granting themselves special powers as listed in *Brave New Worlds*, below (page 21).

Normally a ghost councilor is on hand to control the lighthouse and operate the lamps. Nicodemus or Vicemi can contact the operator magically from anywhere on the palace grounds. Additionally, two marksmen sit around very bored.

F. Carriage House.

- 18 Obscurati bookpin guards
- 8 Obscurati arcane marksmen

When the guards are not active, they rest here. They have converted the carriage and horse stalls into small rooms. At any given time half of the guards are actively patrolling, while the other half are here resting or preparing food, cleaning, etc.

G. South Balcony.

The ground level exit of the lighthouse feeds onto this wide balcony, which is normally unlit. Stairs lead down 40 feet to the sea, where boats could row in and deliver visitors or supplies.

H. Beach Trail.

This plain path leads to the flatter beach on the eastern shore, and eventually circles around to the main docks, about 2 miles away. In the Bleak Gate there are no waves, no surf, and no sea breeze.

I. Sea.

The water here is fairly shallow here, only about 10 feet deep. If a character with the Spirit Medium theme stands near the sea in the Bleak Gate – perhaps on the beach trail or the south balcony – he hears pained cries coming from the large rocky island called Cacciatreze de Nav, the Slayer of Ships.

Further out, the still waters around the island are patrolled by three experimental steam-powered warships, which are equipped with arcane shields to keep out supernatural threats. They are nimble but relatively slow compared to other warships, though still fast enough to chase off the sea creatures of the Bleak Gate. They hit hard, but are not particularly resilient. Their statistics are presented in the *Panicked Evacuation* encounter (page 34).

J. Cacciatreze de Nav.

This massive spire of rock rises dramatically out of the sea, wider in its middle than at its base, and looking like it would blow over in a strong enough storm. A small cave has been eroded in the

south side, and 50 years ago a young pirate died here, stranded and desperate. His skeleton remains, scattered by the tide within the cave.

No one has yet found the boy's skeleton, but if someone enters the cave his ghost will appear (either in the real world or in the Bleak Gate). He begs to be brought back to the mainland. If the party agrees and collects his bones, they can be aided by the Ghost Ship in the *Panicked Evacuation* encounter (page 34).

Indoors, First Floor.

Gaslight lamps illuminate the mansion except where noted. These lamps are all potential wayfarer's lanterns, controlled by a ghost councilor in the lighthouse (Area E). The lighthouse operator just gets to choose what kind of gas to feed in; the lamps can still be shut off or destroyed locally. Normally, though, they just shed pleasant light.

Since guards are likely to move around, we list them by general area (see areas A through F above), rather than individual rooms.

K. Grand Foyer.

This vast entry hall stretches 80 feet in either direction, and has 20-foot ceilings. Luxurious red rugs guide walkers across a marble floor with a repeating zig-zag pattern in black and white. Fine wood covers stone walls, and rare pieces of painting, sculpture, and jewelry are on display here and throughout the palace.

Double stairs lead up to the second floor. Doors lead sideways into two lounges, while a set of double doors lead south to the main hall. Heated plumbing warms the floors here, as well as in the lounges and main hall.

L. Lounges.

Each lounge has comfortable leather chairs where up to 30 people can drink expensive spirits while discussing weighty matters. The side rooms have closets for people to hang cloaks, as well as racks of alcohol and shelves with a few hundred books for research or conversation starters.

M. Main Hall.

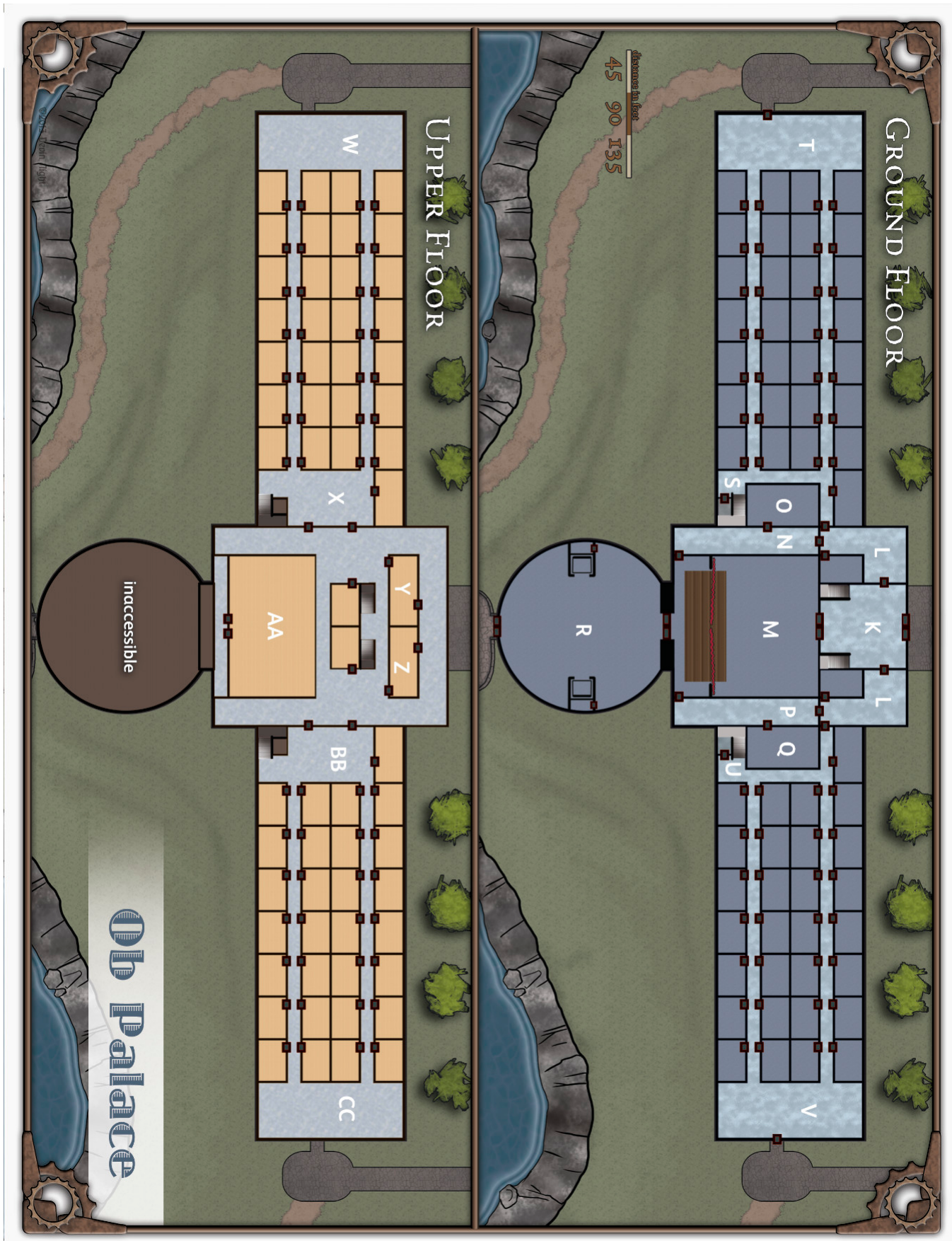
Over a 100 feet across, this hall can seat a hundred people at tables for dinner or special events. A stage rises at the south end, and chemical spotlights can illuminate speakers or performers. A heavy red curtain separates the main hall from the back stage, where mechanisms control the lights. A double doorway leads south to the lighthouse.

N. Kitchen.

This long room has multiple cook stations to prepare food for large gatherings. The Obscurati didn't want to risk bringing that many cooks here, so only a handful of guards with cooking talents work here, directing special unseen servant-style spells.

O. Icebox.

This room stores most of the perishable food supplies of the palace. Magic keeps it perpetually just above freezing, and vents in the floor can be opened to circulate frigid air through ducts that lead around the building. Since the ducts need to be cleaned occasion-





ally, they're large enough for an adult man to crawl through, and they run throughout the mansion, with access points in each room, usually hidden behind furniture.

P. Storage.

Furniture, linens, and similar domestic necessities are stored here.

Q. Dry Goods.

Non-perishable foodstuffs, plus a few tools for repair. Casks of lantern oil are stacked along one wall.

R. Lighthouse, First Floor.

Mostly empty, this area has ladders along the interior walls, as well as two freight elevators. Sixty feet up is the gas supply and the pumps that feed it to the various lamps throughout the palace.

S. West Wing, First Floor.

- 2 Obscurati bookpin guards

Stairs lead up to the second floor, with a maintenance closet beneath. The ghost councilors lurk in these rooms, often floating silent and dormant unless their counsel is needed. Sometimes they fly out of the windows and circle the building, watching the goings-on of the still-living with cold detachment.

The rooms here are all empty except five. The four on the west end (near Area T) have lights so ghosts can read books if they desire, and one additional room acts as the cell for the spy Vitus Sigismund. A portal painting (see page 21) has been placed in that suite's bathroom, the door to which is locked and watched by two guards.

The painting leads to a demiplane with several nigh inescapable prison cells, their defenses magically enhanced. A dozen other men – condemned prisoners from Crisillyir – are also kept here in their own cells. Members of the ghost council occasionally come by to observe Vitus, but they leave the interrogation to Vicemi.

T. Den.

The ghost council meets here if they need to discuss matters. It is left unlit, with sheets over the furniture.

U. East Wing, First Floor.

Though physically identical to the west wing, this area is full of life, with nearly every suite occupied. Each suite has a desk in one corner, a bed in another, a bathroom, a closet, and a fireplace. The fireplaces in the two central rows of rooms that sit back to back share chimneys, and the brick backing of each fireplace is fairly thin. It would be possible to break through these, allowing a quick if unorthodox route between the northern and southern hallways.

V. Trophy Room.

In the real world version of this room, old tattered taxidermied heads of beasts hang from the walls. Here they are covered with sheets to hide their morbid decay. Guests can enjoy a pool table, a piano, and a set of instruments stored along the west wall. The entire north, south, and east walls are windows.

Indoors, Second Floor.

On the second floor of the central building, the walls are covered with a dozen floor-to-ceiling paintings. Each is covered with a curtain when the party arrives, and are only unveiled later in the evening. These paintings are portals to demi-planes. Each demiplane spans about 100 feet and represents a possible confluence of planar energies. In short, these are demos of the new worlds the Ob could create.

W. Council Room.

Nicodemus holds meetings here. Usually his affairs are watched by members of the ghost council, and there are always at least a half dozen or so ghosts floating outside the windows here.

X. West Wing, Second Floor.

The four suites nearest the upstairs council room (Area W) host Nicodemus, Han Jierre and his bodyguard Bert Facie, Cula Ravjahani, and Catherine Romana. The other rooms here, and the hallways, are unlit.

Y. Chapel.

The real-world version of this room was a chapel for daily prayers. Here the religious iconography on the walls have been covered by thick red curtains, and the room is stocked with snacks and drinks, so those on the second floor don't have to go downstairs if they're puckish.

Z. Infirmary.

This has lots of mostly-useless medical supplies, ready just in case something goes horribly wrong and there are more injured people than there is magical healing available.

AA. Library.

This vast library has 10 rows of bookstacks, plus 8 long tables for researchers.

BB. East Wing, Second Floor.

As on the first floor, most of the suites here are occupied.

CC. Dance Hall.

Since only a handful of the Ob officers would dance even if asked, this area's fine dance floor has been covered with high and low tables, chairs, stools, and several other sets of furniture to motivate conversation.

Getting Comfortable

Exploration/Social. Montage.

The party is split up into different rooms and given time to mingle before the opening of the convocation.

Refresh the players' memories about their arrival at the palace, meeting Han Jierre, transitioning into the Bleak Gate, the capture of the spy, the ghostly return of Reed Macbannin, and their brief introduction to Nicodemus.



Benedict Pemberton. The dragon Gradiax, Lord of Steel, has almost never resumed his true form for the past two centuries, and has grown accustomed to his eccentric alternate identity as a businessman and technologist. Though he only looks about fifty, and has the verve of a young man, he jokingly exaggerates his aged infirmities. He speaks slowly with a deep, country-accented voice, and often leans back and tucks his thumbs in his belt loops as he talks. (Imagine a more laid-back Foghorn Leghorn.)



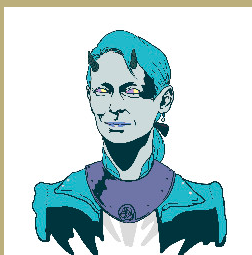
Confident in his ability to win in the long run, Pemberton almost never loses his cool. He enjoys playing subtle power games; in the middle of a tense conversation he might reach into his coat, draw a small flip-knife, and ask an enemy to hold it for him while he fishes out a cigar, then takes the knife back so he can cut the tip off before lighting it.

Erskine Haffkruger. This dwarf environmental biologist was recruited to ensure that life can flourish under different planar alignments. After his initial tests with flora and fauna were encouraging, he abducted dozens to perform “human trials.” He’s eerily fascinated with people who possess atypical phenotypes, and has blistering social awkwardness, which in a way makes him the perfect set of eyes for Benedict Pemberton.



The dragon industrialist replaced the real Haffkruger with a duplicant. The dwarf goes about his business completely normally, though he refrains from food. Pemberton usually has a flunky watching through the duplicant’s eyes, but when things are important he takes over, and can speak through the machine.

Amielle Latimer. A century ago Amielle brought her one-of-a-kind rifle to Flint and lent her keen marksmanship toward defeating the witches of Cauldron Hill. That olive branch opened up the city to investment by industrialists from Danor, which had by that point fought two painful wars with Risur. Amielle proposed the plan, and it worked like clockwork.



It is then fitting, perhaps, that Amielle promotes the Watchmaker faction of the conspiracy, and has designed a plan for a thousand year destiny that will lead the world to prosperity and peace. A grandiose woman with grandiose plans, she is only stymied by the fact that she died 80 years ago, and while she endures as part of the ghost council her influence is weak compared to Vicemi Terio. She still remembers life fondly, and she often disagrees with her fellow ghosts, showing her disapproval with piping sarcastic laughter.

As a ghost she still has her rifle. Amielle is a playable character in the short adventure *Bonds of Forced Faith*, which occurs during her heyday.



Nicodemus tells Grappa (whom he thinks is Leone) it’s a pleasure to see him again, and explains that he’s gotten a new face since he visited the vineyard. Then he invites the PCs and Grappa to have a seat, and then he asks each of them to introduce themselves. He apologizes for not being quite as good with remembering names as Han, since he’s never been a big one for politics and hobnobbing.

He explains that as of now, they should feel free to discuss whatever they want about their roles in the Obscurati, then adds to Grappa, “Except, you know, keep that one thing secret, of course.” (He’s referring to Roland Stanfield’s still-secret position as head of Colossus Cell. Grappa cannot share his knowledge about that with the party, due to a *geas* placed on him by Kasvarina.)

Accommodations.

After Nicodemus has a moment to talk to each of them in turn, he checks a notebook and says that since they’re the last arrivals, he’ll need to put them two to a room. He’d love to open up some rooms in the west wing, but Vicemi has advised him not to, for security reasons. They’ll have about an hour to settle in, and then it will be time for everyone to gather in the main hall.

He explains that later this evening after he gives a welcoming speech, the visiting officers will be split into groups of 8 or 10 people so they can meet with different speakers in turn. He wants this group of visitors that came in with Leone to stick together; he says that he and his advisors thought the different points of view of the group would lead to some interesting discussions.

There’s just one more person he wants to add to their group: a dwarf named **Erskine Haffkruger**, who came in on a different ship.

Lounge Time.

Nicodemus asks for the group to give him some time alone with Leone, and suggests they head back down to the first floor lounges to find Erskine. He asks that they not intrude into the west wing unless invited, because the ghost council likes its privacy.

The party can wander and snoop, but guards do deter them from looking around the portal paintings on the second floor of the central building, and the ghosts get upset if they linger in the west wing too long. Most of the activity is in the two lounges, though (Area L).

Meet Erskine.

While dozens of Ob officers break the ice over brandy, whiskey, and wine, Erskine is surveying the crowd from a corner while listening to a halfling named Alloquicious (who had a cameo in the arms fair in Adventure Three, *Digging for Lies*). The little inventor is joyfully describing how he was nearly caught and had to use his prototype mechanical battle suit to murder some of his underlings to make sure the RHC didn’t catch him. Erskine casually asks for details about the suit, but looks thoroughly unimpressed as the halfling describes it.

Erskine responds to most social situations by awkwardly asking basic framing questions like, “Why do you want to talk to me?” or “What do you want to talk about?” He tries to avoid talking about his work, warning that it is very boring, but if pressed he proves



his warning fair by droning on about the nuances of how the purpose of the appendix is apparently to maintain a reservoir of native elemental energy in the event of extraplanar travel.

Erskine knows he's to be put into a group with the party, and goes along with it without any fuss. He basically never talks unless someone asks him a question, but you should make a point to mention that he hangs near the party unless they make a point to part ways with him. Keep track of things he witnesses that might help explain how Pemberton figures out they're the same constables who thwarted him a few months earlier.

Shake a Ghost's Hand.

A ghost who has been making her way through the crowd now reaches the party. **Amielle Latimer**, one of the most lively members of the ghost council, glides up to them with a case of fine cigars levitating beside her incorporeal body. She introduces herself, offers cigars as they answer, and playfully asks them to enjoy these twice as much since she can't smoke them herself anymore.

She adds that Nicodemus wants her to be fair and wait for the proper time to meet people, but she wanted to add a bit of life to the party. With a short peal of laughter she tells them she looks forward to talking more later, then spins and glides away.

Villainous Bragging.

Dame Constance Baden, head of the Obscurati's "blue sky" division researching outlandish ideas to see what might be possible, is just reaching the end of a humorous story (about accidentally boarding a hostile ship when her test balloon crashed) as Amielle leaves, and a huge burst of laughter should get their attention.

She sighs and says that she hopes that out of this group of clever people, somehow they'll manage to make flight possible again. Then she gestures to another in the group, asking them to share the worst setback they had.

Barro Bangristo, a minotaur professor from Ber, starts to tell a story about how his attempt to enlist someone into his cell didn't turn out well, an experience many present groan at in sympathy. In Barro's story, he wanted to turn a theater student into a spy in the Bruse's court, and had been grooming the kid for months. Then one day the student bragged that Beran officials wanted to recruit him to be a spy in Risur, and he'd been practicing by snooping around the university. The kid had actually found the secret meeting place some of Barro's other students, but he thought it was just a smuggling ring.

To salvage the situation, Barro offered to go with the kid to investigate, and then had his other students plead their case in person. The kid instead tried to run, and ended up getting himself crushed by a statue that he knocked over. Barro laughs and explains a series of cascading, ever-worsening problems (a watchman investigates, a hyperintelligent bear breaks loose, a mind-control spell backfires, etc.), culminating in he and his cell having to provoke a riot on the campus in order to cover everything up.

At first, some of the officers listening look a little unsettled at the talk of death, but a few laugh, and Barro clearly enjoys the story, which encourages more of them to chuckle and eventually cheer when their fellow conspirator pulls off a clutch victory.

Another officer, **Rakovnik Brasny** from Crisillyir, gives a long sigh and says that it feels good to be able to talk about these things and not be judged. Then he dives into a story of his own involving criminal allies, bribery, and murder. His audience is sympathetic, since practically every officer here has had similar experiences.

If the party listens in, within 10 minutes it should be clear to them that despite the noble aims of the Obscurati, its members feel few qualms about destroying those who get in their way.

Miscellanea.

If you need to add any other local color, see Appendix One: Complete Officer Roster (in Part Three, Appendix). Just note that all the members of the ghost council, as well as Nicodemus, Catherine Romana, Cula Ravjahani, and Han Jierre are making final preparations in Area W.

Call to Order.

Half an hour later, ghost councilors come in and ask all in attendance to return to the grand foyer and enter the main hall. Large round tables have designated seating for each of the five groups of guests, plus a table in front with the representatives of the different factions. Grappa has been assigned to a different group across the room.

Opening Statement

Exposition. Real-Time.

Nicodemus explains exactly what the conspiracy is up to, and asks the guests to split up into groups to discuss.

Lights dim, and the crowd murmur fades out. Two incandescent calcium oxide spotlights shine down on a stage podium, slicing out a single bright oval in the dark hall. Nicodemus steps into the light and places an unlit lantern the size of a pumpkin on the podium. He surveys the crowd for a moment, then begins his oration.

"We have gathered for this convocation because we share a purpose." As he speaks, he draws a cigarette from a case and lights it with a match. He takes a casual drag and continues, speaking through the smoke.

"That purpose is to fix the unsteady course of a flawed world. Some of us have worked to kindle industry, thinking progress and invention will defend nations from war and suffering. Others have ingratiated themselves with the callous and corrupt, ready to unmask their true faces and replace them with more honest and just leaders. You've unearthed ancient relics that revealed the forgotten origins of today's woes, and have with regrettable necessity silenced those who would have revealed and thwarted our grand design.

"Few of you have been trusted with the full extent of our agenda. You know simply that I or one of our other officers asked you to cloak yourselves, and then to strive and correct some flaw of society that the common people and their complacently powerful masters have chosen as 'the way things are.' Unlike them, we have not been content with an imperfect world, because we rebel against the conceit that the inertia of the world cannot change, that its course is



set, that there is fate, or destiny.

"But the truth is, at their basest physical level, life, our planet, and everything we know is swayed by forces beyond us. If I may move from broad strokes to scientific particulars, our world is connected by ancient magic to eight planes — elemental realms of fire and earth and air and water, and inscrutable lands where time and space, life and death are corporeal and manifest. Look skyward and you can see these distant discs tracing their orbits through the night.

"These eight are but a handful in an infinite starscape of planes, and some of our agents have peered into the night sky to learn their nature. One airy world they spied through a powerful lens reveals itself to generate calmer and more predictable storms than we have here. Another planet, a dappled purple and yellow orb, is possessed of warm clouds and a strong cheerful emotion, while countless miles away a hazy nebula is wracked by eternal lightning — destructive but swift and powerful.

"Now, we have a world of our own full of elemental air energy, but its skies are thin, and the winds are erratic. Imagine if, instead of that plane, our world was infused with the energy from one of those others. It would change our climate. It would change, on subtle level, the emotions you feel looking at the sky. More than that, it would change the very fate of civilization.

"There is an ancient ritual seal, crafted and hidden by our distant ancestors, who chose which of these realms ours would be linked to. But we have learned how to open that seal, and we are ready to change which planes dance in orbit with us. And that, ladies and gentleman, is the true purpose of our convocation. My name is Nicodemus, and though it was I who set this endeavor in motion, it is the right of you, the agents and officers of the Obscurati, to set a new course for all the people of this world.

"For centuries prophets have sought visions in the night sky, and why? Because those eight worlds have power over us. The motion of the stars allows different ideals to gain ascendance: war, decay, chaos, exploration, order, creation. But no longer shall the procession of heaven obey the whims of an ancient, absent clockmaker. Now the hand that moves the stars shall be ours!"

The rest of the audience applauds, and then Nicodemus steps aside as Han Jierre ascends to the podium. He explains the particulars of how the grand design will work. You can either explain it for your players or just let them read **Player Handout — Grand Design**. Save the faction handouts for later in the evening, as they meet with each faction representative, and the "Minor and Radical Factions" handout for the next morning.

Factions

Social. Montage.

In turn, the party hears the "pitch" from each major faction. The party has numerous opportunities to talk to other Obscurati officers, learning secrets or perhaps swaying their opinions.

The groups of Ob officers split up and meet with the representatives of each faction, who presents their case each in a different part of the mansion. You'll want to have familiarized yourself

Online Inspiration.

If you want some inspiration for these conversations, EN World hosted a thread wherein members of the messageboard took on the roles of members of the conspiracy. While we ended up changing some things between the time of the thread and the release of this adventure, it could still provide some inspiration.

This is the current link, but as with anything on the Internet, it can change more easily than the printed word can: <http://www.enworld.org/forum/showthread.php?337948-You-re-a-villain-How-would-you-change-the-world-Contest-with-prizes-%28Spoilers-for-ZEITGEIST%29>. (If you need to find it later, a Google search for "EN World panarchist" should get you to the right place.

with the faction proposals in Player Handouts at the end. In brief, the proposals are as follows:

- ▶ **The Arboretum.** Order nature so it can spread and be controlled like industry. Presented by Reed Macbannin outdoors next to the garden (Area A).
- ▶ **Colossus.** Grant ourselves godlike powers to fix problems as they arise. Presented by Catherine Romana in the chapel (Area Y).
- ▶ **Miller's Pyre.** Increase empathy, reduce hypocrisy. Increase goodness and justice. Presented by Cula Ravjahani in the library (Area AA).
- ▶ **Panarchists.** Grant individuals "super-powers," making governments unnecessary. Presented by Han Jierre in the trophy room (Area V).
- ▶ **Watchmakers.** Eliminate free will and design a thousand-year destiny of prosperity for the world. Presented by Amielle Latimer in the dance hall (Area CC).

These presentations start at about 7 PM, and every half hour the groups cycle to the next presenter. At around 10 PM the groups are expected to finish up, at which point they'll be encouraged to discuss the proposals and figure out how best to proceed.

Conversations.

Ultimately there's not much chance for the players to change what the Ob leadership decide to do, but they can influence some of the officers. We don't expect GMs to keep track of 50 different NPCs, but encourage the players to make a note of which Ob officers they manage to reach out to or befriend. In the climax of the adventure, the GM might set most of those officers on the other side of the schism, giving the constables a dilemma: do they save their enemies, in the hope they might be allies later?

Have the party meet with the five presenters in the order listed above. Of the five, all but Reed Macbannin are loyal to Nicodemus. The party won't be changing their minds.

Travel Time.

Between each session, people have about 10 minutes to make it to the next meeting place, leading to a lot of comings-and-goings in the palace. If the party wants to stop by the Portal Gallery upstairs in the central building, see *Brave New Worlds* (page 21). The ghost council is busy meeting with Leone, and the guards can't really pay attention to everyone at once, so this is a fair time for sneaking about.



Missing Person.

During the third session, Reed Macbannin manages to lay a subtle curse upon Ramos Zoltan, an officer from Drakr. Using magic he learned researching the witches of Cauldron Hill, Macbannin compels Zoltan to wander to the icebox (Area O) after the session ends. Then before his next presentation, Macbannin inflicts a wound on himself – as a ghost, he can shrug it off – which is reflected upon Zoltan.

People grow suspicious during the fourth session, and during the fifth session a guard manages to find the dwarf's body, sitting with a dagger wound through his chest and coated in a sheen of ice. A white stone carving of a serpent sits in his lap. What worries Nicodemus the most, though, is that his soul has been forcibly sent to the afterlife, so he cannot be interrogated, resurrected, or turned into a member of the ghost council.

An alert quickly goes up and guards check every room of the palace, but everything else is in order. The party will likely be meeting with Amielle Latimer at this point, who points out that you run into problems like this when people don't act according to the script.

Investigating.

Magical detection can determine that Zoltan was affected by enchantment magic, and the wound was caused by some sort of necromancy. It's unclear where the stone serpent came from (Macbannin arranged for it to be delivered here in a shipment weeks ago, and compelled Zoltan to remove it from its box; he never touched the serpent himself).

Close examination of his body finds a small nick on his ear, as if someone needed his blood. Also, there's a bit of milk still on his moustache. Players might recall these were components in the ritual bonds of forced faith (see Adventure Two, *The Dying Skyseer*), which was iconic to the witches of Cauldron Hill. Or the GM can let a DC 26 Intelligence (Arcana) check figure out the significance. This clue could implicate either Macbannin who studied the witches' history, or Amielle who actually fought them.

The White Serpent is a known symbol of the fey titan called the Voice of Rot. While there actually is a conspirator here (Abeira Stackhouse) who is allied with the titan, Macbannin was just trying to throw people off his scent.

Once the alert ends, Nicodemus makes the rounds and explains what happened. He promises they'll be on the look-out, and he warns people to travel in groups of at least three. Also, he'll be calling people a few at a time to answer some questions.

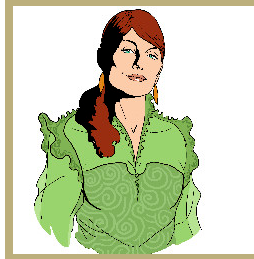
From Here.

Events are fairly flexible during the rest of the night. The PCs might check out the portal gallery (see Brave New Worlds), sneak around (see Mission Impossible), or go talk with Nicodemus (see Quiet Reflection). Near midnight the convocation is gathered again to cast a preliminary vote (see Into the Night).



Cula Rayjahani. Cula has served as an aide to Kasvarina Varal for over a century, but only a few years ago was recruited into the Obscurati. While Kasvarina directs policy, Cula undertakes missions, leading groups of Vekeshi mystics on raids or assassinations. Since her mistress disappeared, Cula has been forced to keep control of many threads. She maintains a perpetual expression of kindness which is not hard to tell is fake, though it keeps her from showing exactly what emotion she's really feeling. That emotion is usually disdain.

In Kasvarina, Cula saw a woman devoted to helping those who suffer from the vices of others, and she finds few Obscurati officers live up to that ideal. While her opinion of Kasvarina glosses over some of her darker misdeeds, Cula is nevertheless motivated to help the weak, and to ensure the cruel fall. At the convocation she represents the Miller's Pyre faction.



Catherine Romana. Descendant of a previous queen of Risur, Catherine has long sought to rise in power herself, but the traditions of her nation deter hereditary rule. After the Fourth Yerasol War she got into trouble for harshly criticizing war veterans, implying that cowardice led to Risur losing ground in the war.

Though she believes magic is superior to technology, she desires progress, and has pushed the Risuri parliament to pursue grand civil projects of arcane engineering, to little success. In the Obscurati she sees her chance both to make the world a better place, and to step into a position of rule over her homeland.

She prefers the high of fey pepper and the false and wondrous world it conjures to the world she really has to deal with. She recognizes this flaw in herself, and overschedules her time so she doesn't have opportunities to indulge. Here at the convocation she represents the Colossus faction.

Brave New Worlds

Exploration. Montage.

The party can enter demi-planes, tied to painted canvas, which reflect how each new world order would feel. Convicted criminals are brought out to showcase the effects.

Encourage the party to visit the Portal Gallery on the second floor of the central building. In the adventure's climax it will make a grand place for combat.

There are twelve portal paintings spread around the area, each with a curtain that must be drawn back to reveal the world within. Each painting has an ornate wooden frame over ten feet high, which acts like a window, leading into a pocket demi-plane roughly 100 feet across.

If the frame is damaged, the demi-plane starts to collapse. Patches of the world disappear, the unique magical elements fade, and 3 rounds later the room becomes a hollow vacuum with no gravity and no air.

Creatures wearing gold rings can neither enter nor leave the portal paintings.





Arboretum.

A verdant garden waits within, lit by a warm (but illusory) sun. A person who touches a plant motivates it to grow, making the plantlife almost as malleable as clay. With a concerted effort of will, the clouds overhead can shift and weather can change. The air is invigorating and crisp, and water from a fountain here restores creatures who drink from it to full hit points. Trees here provide the most succulent fruit, and one unusual tree actually has haunches of medium-rare beef dangling from its branches.

Colossus.

This world has a dramatic cliff overlooking a 20-foot chasm, and on the far side waits a house made of huge blocks of stone. Within the house is a clay stele with a stylus leaning against it. Visitors are encouraged to go inside, jump across the gap, then carve their name into the stele to take dominion over the space. When they're done enjoying the power that grants them, they should erase their name from the clay and emerge so someone else can try it.

Inside the demiplane, creatures have their lifting capacity multiplied by over 100. The distance they can leap is likewise magnified

dramatically. They have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, Regeneration 20, and advantage on saving throws. When someone has claimed dominion in the area, they gain the ability to sense all events in the area regardless of line of sight, gain a +10 bonus to Wisdom (Perception) checks, and can teleport as a bonus action to anywhere in the area. Characters who experiment can sense the potential for other powers, though unlocking them would take much meditation or experimentation.

Miller's Pyre.

This portal leads to a library, but every table and shelf has some sort of weapon in clear view: guns, knives, swords, and the like.

Before letting people in, first a ghost counselor calls for a pair of prisoners to be retrieved from the prison demi-plane in area S. The men arrive nervous and bickering, and the ghost counselor explains these are condemned men from Crislyir, murderers both, and for the past week they've been giving half-rations to one, stocking discontent.

The men's chains are removed, and they are shoved across the threshold of the demi-plane.

"There are plenty of weapons here," says the ghost counselor. "Only one of you is getting out alive."

Immediately the two men rush for the knife, and one gets it. He turns on the other, who shakes his head and cowers. The knife-wielder hesitates, then explains how upset he feels that the other guy has been treated better than him. The other guy says it's not his fault how they were treated. The knife-wielder nods, looks uncomfortable, and then asks politely if the other guy will stay here so he can leave, and maybe get some food outside. The other guy agrees, saying that seems fair, and then thanks him for not being violent.

The knife-wielder steps back into the real world, and the other guy sighs, then grabs a book and starts reading.

The prisoners are then removed, and the guards take them away with orders to give them both a decent meal once they're back in their cells.

Inside this plane, creatures gain a +10 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks, a +10 bonus to Wisdom (Insight) checks, take a -10 penalty to Charisma (Intimidation) checks, and have disadvantage on attack rolls. Additionally, a creature must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw each time it wants to take an action that would cause damage to another sentient creature, and if it fails it cannot attack that turn.

Panarchists.

A three story house with windows but no doors sits in a forest, the trees of which have high, climbable branches. The ghost counselor encourages you to explore the house, which requires teleporting between rooms that have no normal entrance. People are encouraged to enter three at a time, and to have one person ask a favor from the other. If they agree, they feel a subtle nudge to follow through, like a gentle push at the small of their back.

Likewise, a person who hands an item to someone else then has them carry it away can sense perfectly where it went.

Mechanically, everyone can teleport at will to anywhere they can see or are familiar with, and are familiar with any place their



items are near. Everyone also has Regeneration 20, and if they start their turn dying but not dead, they regain 20 hit points.

Creatures who agree to a trade or service suffer no immediate effects, but if one were to stay in the plane for several days they would accrue penalties if they do not follow through with their promises.

Watchmakers.

You look in on a quaint kitchen, lit by a single candle on the dining table. Within this portal painting, the world operates like clockwork. It is static normally until someone enters, and the guards have a prisoner on hand for the purpose. When people are ready to watch, they set a clock on the wall so its second hand is at zero, and then they push the man into the portal. He disappears, and the clock begins ticking.

A moment later, a door on the far side of the room opens and the man steps in. He closes the door, bends down to pet a dog who barks happily, then goes to a cabinet and pulls out a small cask of fire dust with a short fuse sticking out of it. He sits at the table, lights the fuse, and places it in the bomb right in front of him.

The dog comes by, and the man moves to pet it, but his arm jostles the cask. It falls over and rolls for the far side of the table. The man stands up in surprise, and the table flips over. The cask hits the ground right as the table spins to the perfect orientation, and then an explosion goes off. The table blocks the force perfectly, and the man and dog are unharmed.

The man then does a perfectly choreographed jig for 10 seconds, bows to the audience outside the painting, and steps out into the real world at precisely 60 seconds on the clock. The world inside the painting resets instantly to its base state.

The prisoner can go through this ordeal as many times as those outside want, though his protests grow more severe as time goes on. Each time is identical, though when he comes out he clearly remembers. If asked, he'll admit that while in that world he always feels the same way, but when he comes out he panics, afraid that next time maybe something might go wrong.

If anyone else steps into the painting, they take on the role of the prisoner, and while a few small details might change (like the speed or distance the cask rolls when people of different sizes bump it), the result is always the same. Person goes in, enters through the same door, bomb goes off without damage, person comes out. (If someone tries to enter while the event is in process, they are temporally displaced and only reappear once the cycle has reset.)

The ghost councilor here warns not to stress the scenario too much. For instance, if a man with no arms entered the painting, he wouldn't be able to fulfill the necessary steps to progress the timeline, and he'll just stand there blankly until Amielle comes by to pause the scenario and let him leave.

Minor Worlds.

These worlds do not represent specific proposals of the Obscurati, but are rather examples of the many things they could do.

Bards.

A small concert hall has perfect acoustics, and anyone who steps inside finds himself casually desiring to sing, play an instrument,

or otherwise perform. They can freely resist the idea, but if they go along with it they find it easy to notice what is wrong with their form and make slow progress to improve.

Mortal Mind.

A small field has several chapels and shrines, each devoted to a different faith, and a mechanical device plays a recording of different pieces of sacred music. Those outside the painting feel the normal emotions they associate with those religions, but once they step inside they find themselves completely unmoved by them. They can appreciate the artistic talent that went into the music, but do not find them beautiful. Those of strong faith who come out of this portal plane can't help but feel unsettled.

Creatures in this area cannot cast divine spells.

Leave the Nest.

The portal opens forty feet in the air above a storm-tossed sea. An island rises out of the sea 20 feet away, and it's home to large flocks of birds. Creatures inside have a fly speed of 30 ft., and the birds tend to fly with them.

Trial by Fire.

A pool of lava inside this world has books scattered about the floor, none of them burning. There's even a 20-foot high ledge one can jump from, though the ghost councilor here warns that while you won't be burned, the lava is still fairly viscous.

Creatures here are immune to fire damage, and objects will not burn unless someone within line of sight wills it. Even then, anyone else who wants it not to burn can stop it.

Walking on Sunshine.

A three-dimensional obstacle course with poles and balance beams has padded walls. Inside, creatures can choose for gravity to be in whatever direction they want. Objects float unless someone wills them to fall a given direction.

Windows exist on all six walls, and beams of light shine in through each. Creatures can interact with these beams of light as if they were solid, and can even grab and adjust in mid-beam as if adjusting a hinged pole.

Downward.

This unusual world has two sets of stone stairs leading up to a fountain, from which water pours over a ledge into a pool. But no matter which way you walk, you always feel like you're going downhill. You can even swim through the waterfall, from the pool to the fountain, and feel like you're rushing down a river.

Menagerie.

A snowy hill with evergreen trees overlooks an icy pond. Inside this world, living creatures can shapeshift at will to any creature within a size category of their normal form. The ghost councilor here encourages people to consider swans, bears, eagles, or even penguins. Undead creatures in this area are staggered.



Quiet Reflection

Social. Real-Time.

The constables each have an opportunity to talk with Nicodemus alone.

After Zoltan's murder, Nicodemus needs to calm nerves of those in attendance. He leaves finding the killer to the ghost council, but as the face of the conspiracy he makes a point to speak with everyone, one by one. Since your players will likely want to discuss what they've learned and make plans, you might just peel them off one by one.

Two guards come to invite each member of the conspiracy to head to the top floor of the lighthouse and talk with Nicodemus on the balcony. The conversation is always roughly the same. Cigarette in hand, Nicodemus asks how they're doing, whether they saw anything or know anything related to the murder, and then spares a minute or two to reflect on the state of the world.

He might lament the lack of stars to gaze at here in the Bleak Gate, or the lack of breeze blowing off the sea. The weight of working in secret so long weighs on him, and despite his better judgment he's looking for a kindred spirit to share his burdens with. Most of these conversations end abruptly as Nicodemus looks at a pocket watch and apologizes for needing to be in a rush.

If any PC responds empathetically, though, Nicodemus might ask them to spend a few minutes with him. He calls to the ghost councilor who controls the lighthouse, grabs four amulets, and then has the lighthouse activate to shift them back into the real world. By placing the amulets on, he, the PC, and the two guards will be able to walk around the island and see what it's really like. He tells the ghost councilor to turn the lighthouse back on in half an hour, but to leave the light off for now so he can see the stars.

Then he takes a long walk on the beach, cold surf washing up on shore and wiping away their footprints as he asks the PC about his life, what motivates him, and how he'd change things if he could make the decision all by himself. If asked about himself he hedges, saying that it's been a long time since he had an actual life of his own, and that he needs to hear the lives of others or else he might lose touch of what it is to be human.

Loot.

Before this scene, figure out which PC would have the highest concordance with the artifact known as the *humble hook* (see Part Three, Appendix). When that PC talks with Nicodemus, at some point the ghost councilor inside the lighthouse calls Nic aside to ask a question, and the PC hears a metallic clink as he leaves. The necklace has made itself fall off of Nicodemus, and it lands at the PC's feet. No one would see him if he picks it up, and Nicodemus does not notice its absence until after the adventure ends.

The story of the *humble hook* is presented in the *ZEITGEIST Player's Guide*.

Into the Night

Social. Montage.

The conspirators discuss, then cast a preliminary vote.

The mood of the convocation turns wary. Some theories are bandied around, including that a spy has infiltrated them, that this is some sort of mind game by Nicodemus, or that someone's trying to kill people who would vote for a different faction – though no one knows what faction Zoltan was favoring. Amielle Latimer jokingly suggests it could be the ghost pirates, and eagerly tells the story of how they all perished (page 24).

Most people gather in the trophy room (Area V) or the dance hall (Area CC) to have large group discussions, with a few people getting up the courage to go in small groups to visit the Portal Gallery.

Preliminary Vote.

At midnight, Nicodemus asks everyone to gather again in the Main Hall. Erected on stage is a metal plate with the names of the five factions painted on it, as well as "Other." Beside it is another plate with small magnets tags, each of which has the name of one of the Obscurati officers. Nicodemus asks people to file through, pick up their named magnet, and cast a vote. He reminds them this is just preliminary, and that tomorrow night everyone will be able to cast a new vote, and that other proposals might be added between now and then.

They made sure that Zoltan's magnet has already been removed.

Count.

Everyone is asked to vote, even if they just vote Other. Nicodemus goes first, placing his magnet on Miller's Pyre. Vicemi Terio goes next, telekinetically placing the 25 magnets for himself and the majority of the ghost council on Other. He explains that after the final vote, the ghost council will endorse whichever faction has the most votes.

Let the PCs go last. Not counting their votes, the result is: {{I hope I don't mess up the math. 52 officers, 7 of them PCs, 2 not present, 1 a spy who's locked up, 1 now dead = 41. Plus 24 nameless ghosts and 3 named ghosts = 68 total, right?}}

- ▶ The Arboretum. 4 votes.
- ▶ Colossus. 9 votes.
- ▶ Miller's Pyre. 10 votes.
- ▶ Panarchists. 7 votes.
- ▶ Watchmakers. 5 votes.
- ▶ Other. 8 votes, plus 25 ghosts.

The "Other" votes are cast by the representatives of the minor factions. At this point, give the group **Player Handout – Minor and Radical Factions**. Hopefully your players won't worry about the minutiae of who votes how. Grappa votes for Watchmakers. Erskine Haffkruger votes for Arboretum. The votes of the other key NPCs should be obvious.





Dining on Ashes.

After the vote, people go back to various conversation spots to keep on politicking and debating. One proposal that starts to gather a fair bit of support is a compromise – designed by Dame Constance Baden – called MAP. It mixes elements of Miller's Pyre, Arboretum, and Panarchists, as well as Long Now, Trekkers, and Sky League. Dame Constance estimates they can get 24 votes easily, and if it gets the ghost council and Vicemi that's 49 out of the needed 57.

Unfortunately, those in the Colossus and Watchmaker factions are strongly opposed to Miller's Pyre, and shrug off accusations that they're just worried they'll end up with less power in the new world order.

Discussion and arguments continue as people look for common ground, but eventually people must sleep. Barring party-motivated trouble, the talks die down around 2 in the morning as people head off to bed. Erskine Haffkruger is the last to go to his room.

Mission Impossible

Exploration. Montage.

By stealth and subterfuge, constables can find treasure, spy on private meetings, sabotage, or free prisoners.

Some events, people, and items are technically off-limits. Generally if PCs want to sneak around and are smart about it, don't worry about making them roll unless they really press their luck.

Vitus and the Prison Plane.

The guards that watch the portal painting that holds Vitus have been letting ghosts in all night, so they won't stop a PC who wants in, but they do listen and will report anything suspicious.

The portal painting has a thread of gold in its frame. The gold ring must be broken (as easy as bending a wire and then putting it back in place) for anyone to enter or leave the demi-plane; otherwise the surface is like indestructible glass.

Vitus is not one to speak first. Though he knows the gods will not always save those in need, he has prayed. If he should receive deliverance, he wants to leave with as much knowledge of the conspiracy as possible, so he tries to convince interrogators to speak first. His best argument is that clearly he is a prisoner and won't escape, so if sharing information with him will make him answer their questions, it is a great deal, since it ultimately costs the Ob nothing.

He doesn't judge until he knows more, and if anyone explains the Ob's plans he asks for a few minutes to consider the ramifications. Then he says it is every individual's challenge in life to make him- or herself better. The purpose of life is therefore to prevail over adversity, so he fears that making the world "a better place" will actually eliminate the meaning of life.

Rescue.

Freeing Vitus is a simple matter of breaking the cage that holds him and taking him out. While he can be a useful ally in combat, if the escape attempt is spotted it will quickly bring the palace's defenders down on the party. However, during the Splinter Cell

scene, the chaos provides a perfect opportunity to get Vitus and perhaps the other dozen prisoners here to safety.

If Vitus survives this adventure, he can be an incredible help in Adventure Eight, *Diaspora*, while the party passes through Crisilyr, and he might be able to aid them in averting a local apocalypse in Adventure Eleven, *Gorged on Ruins*.

In more immediate terms, when he gets back to the mainland he'll rally a fleet of Clergy warships to bombard this island and declare it exterminatus. Three hierarchs will call forth a great rift in the sea to swallow the island, destroying it even in the Bleak Gate.

Ally.

Use these statistics should Vitus join the party in combat.

Vitus Sigismund

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good monk (open fist) 8 / paladin (oath of devotion) 4

Armor Class 18 (Wisdom)

Hit Points 82 (8d8+4d10+24)

Speed 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws STR +5, DEX +8

Skills Acrobatics +8, Insight +7, Perception +8, Persuasion +6, Religion +3, Stealth +8

Condition Immunities disease

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Common

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Channel Divinity (1/Short Rest). As an action, Vitus presents his holy symbol and channels divinity to use one of the following:

Sacred Weapon. Vitus imbues one weapon that he is holding with positive energy. For 1 minute, he adds +2 to attack rolls with that weapon. The weapon also emits bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light 20 feet beyond that. If the weapon is not already magical, it becomes magical for the duration. Vitus can end this effect on his turn as part of any other action. If he is no longer holding or carrying this weapon, or if he falls unconscious, this effect ends.

Turn the Unholy. Vitus speaks a prayer censuring fiends and undead. Each fiend or undead that can see or hear him within 30 feet of Vitus must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes damage. A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from Vitus as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of him. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can use only the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

Divine Sense (3/Long Rest). As an action, Vitus opens his awareness to detect evil forces. Until the end of his next turn, Vitus knows the location of any celestial, fiend, or undead within 60 feet of him that is not behind total cover. He knows the type (celestial, fiend, or undead) of any being whose presence he senses, but not its identity. Within the same radius, Vitus also detects the presence of any place or object that has been consecrated or desecrated, as with the *hallow* spell.



Divine Smite. When Vitus hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, he can expend one spell slot to deal radiant damage to the target, in addition to the weapon's damage. The extra damage is 2d8 for a 1st-level spell slot. The damage increases by 1d8 if the target is an undead or a fiend.

Evasion. When Vitus is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Feat: Mobile. Vitus can Dash through difficult terrain without requiring additional movement. Whenever he makes an attack against a creature, he doesn't provoke opportunity attacks from that creature until the end of his turn.

Fighting Style: Close Quarters Melee. Vitus can use a bonus action to assume a special defensive stance. This defensive stance lasts until the start of his next turn. He does not need to use his reaction to make opportunity attacks while he is in this defensive stance, and also when a creature moves 5 feet or more while within his reach he can use his reaction to make a melee attack against it.

Ki (8 points/short rest). Vitus can spend ki points to fuel various ki features.

- **Flurry of Blows.** Immediately after Vitus takes the Attack action on his turn, he can spend 1 ki point to make two unarmed strikes as a bonus action.
- **Patient Defense.** Vitus can spend 1 ki point to take the Dodge action as a bonus action on his turn.
- **Step of the Wind.** Vitus can spend 1 ki point to take the Disengage or Dash action as a bonus action on his turn, his jump distance is doubled for the turn.
- **Stunning Attack.** Vitus can spend 1 ki point to attempt to stun a creature he hits with a melee weapon attack. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of his next turn.

Lay on Hands (20 points). As an action, the Speculi Eleganti can touch a creature and restore a number of hit points to it, up to the maximum amount remaining in this pool. Alternatively, they can expend 5 hit points to cure the target of one disease or neutralize one poison affecting it.

Martial Arts. Vitus can use Dexterity instead of Strength for the attack and damage rolls of his unarmed strikes and monk weapons.

Open Hand Technique. Whenever Vitus hits a creature with one of the attacks granted by his Flurry of Blows, he can impose one of the following effects on that target:

- It must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.
- It must make a Strength saving throw. If it fails, Vitus can push it up to 15 feet away from him.
- It can't take reactions until the end of Vitus's next turn.

Spellcasting. Vitus is a 2nd level spellcaster that uses Charisma as his spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14; +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells prepared from the paladin's spell list:

1st-level (2 slots): *bless, cure wounds, divine favor, protection from evil and good, sanctuary, shield of faith*

Stillness of Mind. Vitus can use his action to end one effect on himself that is causing him to be charmed or frightened.

Wholeness of Body (1/Long Rest). As an action, Vitus regains 24 hit points.

ACTIONS

Extra Attack. Vitus attacks twice when he takes the attack action (using a bonus action he can attack a third time with Martial Arts, or a third and fourth time with 1 ki to use Flurry of Blows).

Unarmed. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 7 (1d6+4) magical bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Deflect Missiles. Vitus can use his reaction to deflect or catch the missile when he is hit by a ranged weapon attack. When he does so, the damage he takes from the attack is reduced by 1d10+8. When the damage is reduced to 0, he can catch the missile if it is small enough for him to hold in one hand and he has at least one hand free. If he catch a missile in this way, Vitus can spend 1 ki point to make a ranged attack with the weapon or piece of ammunition he just caught, as part of the same reaction (+8 to hit, range 20/60 ft., 1d6+4 damage).

Slow Fall. Vitus can use his reaction when he falls to reduce any falling damage he takes by 40.

Amielle's Secret Dealings.

If at some point one of the PCs is about to be discovered by a guard (like if they fail a Stealth check), at the last moment another guard distracts the first, telling him he's "got to come see this." Alternately, the party might just spot a lot of guards active outside, or hear a few distant gunshots and grow curious.

The ghost of Amielle Latimer has a hunch that her faction isn't going to win tomorrow's vote, and she knows the importance of contingency plans. More importantly, she knows that Nicodemus has it in him to be murderously efficient about once a century, and he's overdue. So she wants to get as much good will among the bookpin guards and the arcane marksmen.

After most everyone has gone to bed, Amielle heads to the guard quarters at the carriage house (Area F), and offers to get them all fine spirits from the conspiracy's secret stash if any of them can out-shoot her. Since the convocation has been stressful, a half dozen guards eagerly take up her offer so they can blow off some steam.

Sharpshooting.

Amielle takes the six guards and a few onlookers out to a stretch of beach where wooden posts rise up from the sand. She has each of the men bring five wine glasses, and she has brought five shot glasses.

In the challenge, each shooter to hit five targets set on the posts at a range of 200 feet as fast as possible. Amielle sets out five glasses at a time, and each man gets up to one minute. Once all the men have gone, whoever is fastest will go up against Amielle. She places her five shot glasses, and they both start shooting at the same time. Whoever is first to hit a third glass wins.

If any of the guards win, Amielle will get them whatever fine spirits they want. If she wins, then the six guards who tried and failed have to dress up as butlers and scullery maids, using outfits Amielle found in the palace.

**Amielle Latimer**

Medium undead (tiefling), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)**Hit Points** 130 (20d8+40)**Speed** 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws DEX +8, CON +6**Skills** Arcana +6, Deception +7, Perception +11, Persuasion +7, Stealth +12**Damage Resistances** acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks**Damage Immunities** cold, necrotic, poison**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 21**Languages** Common, Primordial**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)**Deft Shooter.** A ranged weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Amielle hits with it (included in the attack).**Eternal Warrior.** While Amielle wields them, her firearms are magical and never need to be reloaded.**Ethereal Sight.** Amielle can see 60 feet into the Ethereal Plane when she is on the Material Plane, and vice versa.**Feat: Superb Aim.** Amielle ignores half cover and three-quarters cover when making a ranged weapon attack, and she doesn't have disadvantage when attacking at long range. When Amielle makes her first ranged weapon attack in a turn, she can choose to take a -5 penalty to her ranged weapon attack rolls in exchange for a +10 bonus to ranged weapon damage.**Incorporeal Movement.** Amielle can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.**Innate Spellcasting.** Amielle's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:**At will:** *telekinesis***1/day:** *darkness***Targeting Shot.** Amielle can use a bonus action to aim at a target within 80 feet, gaining advantage on her next attack roll against it before the end of her turn. On a hit, she deals an extra 18 (4d8) damage.**ACTIONS****Multiattack.** Amielle attacks twice with her rifle or three times with her pistols.**Withering Touch.** Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 17 (4d6+3) necrotic damage.**Pistols.** Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, range 50/150 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (3d6+4) magical piercing damage.**Rifle.** Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, range 80/240 ft., one target. Hit: 17 (3d8+4) magical piercing damage.**Etherealness.** Amielle enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa. She is visible on the Material Plane while she is in the Border Ethereal, and vice versa, yet she can't affect or be affected by anything on the other plane.**Horrifying Visage.** Each non-undead creature within 60 feet of Amielle that can see her must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. If the save fails by 5 or more, the target also ages 1d4 × 10 years. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the frightened condition on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to Amielle's Horrifying Visage for the next 24 hours. The aging effect can be reversed with a greater restoration spell, but only within 24 hours of it occurring.**Possession (Recharge 6).** One humanoid that Amielle can see within 5 feet of her must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be possessed by Amielle; she then disappears, and the target is incapacitated and loses control of its body. Amielle now controls the body but doesn't deprive the target of awareness. She can't be targeted by any attack, spell, or other effect, except ones that turn undead, and she retains her alignment, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma, and immunity to being charmed and frightened. Amielle otherwise uses the possessed target's statistics, but doesn't gain access to the target's knowledge, class features, or proficiencies.

The possession lasts until the body drops to 0 hit points, Amielle ends it as a bonus action, or she is turned or forced out by an effect like the dispel evil and good spell. When the possession ends, she reappears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the body. The target is immune to Amielle's Possession for 24 hours after succeeding on the saving throw or after the possession ends.

She'll let whoever competes against her take out two shot glasses before she responds. Then in one smooth motion she draws and fires two pistols, drops them, slings her rifle off her shoulder, and fires it. Unless a PC manages to fire off three shots in one round, she'll probably beat them. She definitely beats any of the guards.

Give It a Shot.

The targets are at extreme range for most guns, but since they're stationary targets it's possible to hit them. The wine glasses' AC is 8, the shot glasses' is AC 11. The guards are good shots (+9 to-hit), but they can only fire once per round. Amielle, on the other hand, simply does not miss with her ghostly weapons.

Good Sport.

If beaten, Amielle loses with dignity. If she wins, though, she's still a good sport. She invites the guards to "get their new uniforms," and takes them and some other guard onlookers into the palace. She happens to have stashed the uniforms next to one of the bars, and she tells the guards to get dressed, then serve the rest of them drinks. Within fifteen minutes everyone is drinking (except her, since she's a ghost), and Amielle has managed to win the fondness of the guards.

If this is interrupted, Amielle won't have the guards' backing tomorrow, making the Splinter Cell encounter much more one-sided.

Stealing Oil.

Characters might sneak into the lighthouse to retrieve casks of oil that can replicate the effects of any of the demiplanes in the Portal Gallery.



If you have any interesting treasure you'd like the party to get their hands on, perhaps add a treasure vault downstairs of the west wing and drop a few hints to its location.

Second Murder.

Dame Constance's compromise proposal has a lot of support, but the Panarchist faction will have to give up some of their main desires regarding wealth and personal property. That's why Macbannin decides, for his second murder, to take out Constance and pin the murder on the Panarchists, in an effort to disrupt the coalition.

Since he is, after all, a ghost, Macbannin slips into her room through the floor. He makes sure the curtains are drawn, and he silently places a blanket on the bottom of the door to block out light and the smell of smoke. Then he places a curse of deep sleep on Dame Constance and scatters embers from the fireplace onto her bed. He invokes a curse that mimics the infernal wrath that lets tieflings punish their foes with fire, and Constance goes up like a human candle, with her bedsheets as the wick. By morning all that's left are charred bits of bed and the bones of her feet.

As with Zoltan, Constance's soul is sent to the afterlife, so no one can interrogate her or try to turn her into a ghost.

High-Level Meeting.

An hour before dawn, Nicodemus summons Han Jierre, Cula Ravjahani, and Leone Quital (who is still actually Grappa) to meet with him in the Council Room (Area W). Grappa manages to stall long enough to scribble a note ("Meeting Nic. Follow me.") and slip a metal clip onto it. Since the party is likely sleeping, Grappa makes a point to pass by at least one of their rooms, and he uses steelshaping to drop the note and slide it under the door. Then, once he's far enough away that the guards escorting him won't notice, he forcefully rattles the doorknob, which will hopefully be enough to wake some PCs up.

Security.

The ghost council's divinations into the murder all came up fruitless, so Nicodemus assumes the conspiracy's own secrecy magic is biting them in the ass. Which means the murderer is an officer.

Once the guards deliver the people Nicodemus needs, they're sent to stand watch at the far end of the two hallways that lead to the council room. A total of six men wait there, drowsy and grumbling about all the strange foreigners they're having to put up with. The guards aren't particularly attentive (Perception +5), but the spot they've chosen offers practically no cover to hide behind.

Meanwhile, at the near end of each of the two hallways, two senior ghost councilors hover silently, and another four float outside the windows (Perception +17). Again, their high vantage point makes sneaking in more of a creative challenge than a physical one.

The ground floor of the west wing only has its normal patrol of a ghost councilor and a shadowlisk, and between the abandoned rooms, the chimneys, and the ventilation ducts, getting close enough to eavesdrop is certainly possible.

The Discussion.

Nicodemus, Han, Cula, and Leone take seats, while Vicemi stands by the window, wary of threats (Perception +15 for the group as a whole). Nicodemus rolls out a map of the continent of Lanjyr, then uses glass beads to show the areas he's talking about.

Since the colossus broke free eight months ago (bead in Flint), it has wandered through the Dreaming. Since it was designed to resist divination, they can't tell exactly where it is, but it has left massive footprints visible in the real world, through Risur's wetlands (bead) and into the high bayou (bead). It knocked the top off a mountain on the border of Risur and Ber (bead), tromped across the desert toward the east coast (bead), and then disappeared somewhere near Seobriga (bead).

Han asks if the colossus was designed to operate underwater, and Grappa confirms that it was.

Here Vicemi explains that they wondered why the colossus chose that particular path, and now they have a theory. At the same time the colossus escaped, a high elf warrior named Asrabey (Cula rolls her eyes) abducted Kasvarina and spirited her away to the Dreaming. They're fairly certain that Asrabey thought Kasvarina was just a hostage, not one of the founders of this conspiracy, and given her condition (i.e., the fact that her memories were locked away by Alexander Grappa) they hope she cannot compromise them.

Kasvarina is still an officer of the Obscurati, so they could not divine her location, but they could trace Asrabey, and they assume the two remained together. He headed to Elfaivar, then disappeared entirely near some old elven ruins (bead), which they believe have an entrance to an elven enclave, which exists between the real world and the Dreaming. That was five months ago, and just a few days ago colossal footprints were spotted in the jungle near those ruins.

Vicemi's theory is that somehow the colossus is drawn to Kasvarina, perhaps because their memories were both locked away by the same man. So far they've refrained from rescuing Kasvarina, since the risk of an assault on an elven conclave was deemed too high, especially since she has no memories and thus isn't actually useful to the conspiracy. Now, though, it makes sense to secure her.

Nicodemus says that they have a plan to retrieve the colossus from the Dreaming, but it requires bringing the titan to a specific location. He looks meaningfully at Han. Han curses, then nods.

They're referencing the city of Methia, which is the center of Danor's dead magic zone. So severe is the magical sink here that it basically punched a hole through reality into both the Dreaming and the Bleak Gate. All three locations are coterminous at once, but any person who goes there becomes unsettled and eventually goes mad.

Planning a Rescue Mission.

Nicodemus says that their first priority after the convocation ends will be to regain control of the colossus. They still have a few of the prototype golems that were put away for a rainy day, and if they can't find a way to restore the mind of the colossus, they can try implanting one of the other golems' minds.



He asks “Leone” if he would be able to manually control the colossus. Grappa stammers, then says no, that would be too much for him. Nicodemus replies that they’ll keep Leone on hand just in case, to help them at least slow the thing down. He asks for a dossier of vulnerable points to target, and says it might be time to start coming up with fall-back options if the new colossus minds won’t work.

Cula says that she could probably find out what enclave Kasvarina is in. She just needs to know what resources she can bring in in order to rescue Kasvarina. Nic holds up a hand and says they shouldn’t make plans until they know who’s still on their side. He asks if anyone has any pressing business, and when no one does he suggests they all get a filling breakfast.

Han, Cula, and Grappa stand to leave, but Nicodemus calls “Leone” back for a moment, asking what faction he voted for. Grappa says Watchmakers. Nicodemus and Vicemi exchange glances, and after a moment’s hesitation Nic suggests Leone keep an open mind to other, more popular proposals. Grappa leaves.

Nic asks to be alone, and once Vicemi is gone he lights a cigarette and waits for what passes as dawn in the Bleak Gate.

Third Murder.

Reed Macbannin barely knew Leone in life, but in death he’s learned much about the man. Macbannin had hoped to kill Governor Roland Stanfield instead – he even discovered a rare curse that could stop an aasimar from reincarnating – but Leone will do in a pinch. Macbannin blames both for turning him into a traitor to his country. So for his third act of disrupting the conspiracy, he plans to murder the steelshaper.

As Grappa returns to his room, the palace is still mostly sleeping. Unless the party tries to link up with him he simply heads back to his room so he can panic in privacy. But when he closes the door behind him, he finds his throat seizing up. Unable to breathe or speak, he spots a figure lurking in the corner, but it’s too dark for him to tell who.

Grappa doesn’t know how to really defend himself with Leone’s powers. Unless the party is close enough to hear sounds of Grappa desperately smacking metal objects into the walls, within a minute he passes out from asphyxiation, and he’s dead soon thereafter. Macbannin covers things up by slipping a noose around Leone’s throat, tugging it tightly, and levitating the man so he hangs from the ceiling rafter.

If Macbannin succeeds in this murder, he tries to banish the soul of Leone, but doesn’t know the right name for his curse, so Grappa’s soul escapes. It might return in later adventures.

This is Hard to Explain.

If the party is nearby, they can burst into the room and see Macbannin clenching a fist to keep Grappa from breathing. A lot depends on the party’s reaction. Macbannin of course doesn’t know who they really are, so he tries to cover for himself by saying, “We voted for the same faction. This man is our enemy.”

Not that he knows what faction any of the PCs voted for. If his ruse falls through, or if the party attacks him, he shrugs and says, “Someone will stop you madmen. If not me, I know a few constables who are really good at stopping conspiracies.”

Interruptions.

If a PC gets spotted eavesdropping on this meeting, Nicodemus wants to capture him, not kill him. After all, he doesn’t think he’s doing anything those in the conspiracy would disagree with; he just worries that there might be a spy. So, as mentioned in Buddy System (page 12), he would interrogate the PC and ask probing questions. But if the character could cover for himself Nic would be content to chide him for taking risks in a dangerous time, and commend him for his curiosity.

If multiple PCs get caught, though, Nicodemus finds it suspicious that they came in on the same group, which will prompt a more thorough investigation. This could include searching their rooms and their belongings.

Ideally, you’d want to leverage this situation into the party and Macbannin realizing they’re on the same side, or at least have Macbannin get away. He’s certainly not going to alert the ghost council to what happened, and if the party keeps quiet too (or maybe just suggests he goes after other Ob officers instead of them) he’ll try to figure out why.

If he just runs away, Macbannin can return to help the party’s escape during the Splinter Cell encounter.

The Enemy of My Enemy.

If the party admits their identity to Macbannin, he’s shocked and demands proof, like details of how they found and defeated him back in Flint. He’ll explain his change of heart upon coming back as a ghost, and ask if they have a ship full of soldiers who can storm the palace? Sure, his situation has gone from “hopelessly outnumbered” to “hopefully outnumbered,” but the group of them would never manage to start a fight and get out of here alive.

Plus, Macbannin points out that most of the leadership are ghosts, who will come back even if destroyed. He says that he’s prepared a curse that can stop one person from reincarnating or rejuvenating (though if asked why he can’t say, since a geas stops him from revealing that Stanfield is part of the conspiracy); which he thinks would work on Vicemi. He’s not quite sure what Nicodemus is, but knows this isn’t his first body.

Macbannin’s original plan was just to try to sow discord and look for an Ob officer he might be able to trust to deliver a message to the RHC. He can’t travel far from the rest of the ghost council, and at any rate he’s stuck in the Bleak Gate unless he steals one of these lanterns. He nods to the wall-mounted gaslamp, which the party might not have realized before now are wayfarer’s lanterns.

If the party wants to just lay low and use Macbannin as a man on the inside, events in the adventure will proceed as outlined below. But if the party comes up with some sort of crazy plan (perhaps even beating Nicodemus to the punch by using the lanterns as a weapon), let them try it.

Next Morning.

Guards provide wake-up calls at what would be dawn in the real world. Here it just goes from pitch black to gloomy gray outside. Within 10 minutes the guards discover Dame Constance dead, and possibly Leone.



Use these last few hours to resolve any lingering schemes the party has gotten themselves involved with. Additionally, the PCs should witness several small groups slipping into private rooms to hold hushed discussions. During breakfast a fist-fight breaks out between two Berans – one supporting Colossus, the other Panarchist. Accusations and rumors fill the halls, with people growing suspicious of their fellow conspirators' intentions.

The officers are called to enjoy lunch together, but this only provokes a loud, disorganized debate with people from different sides cutting each other off, accompanied by lots of pompous harumphing from their allies. Catherine Romana, who is busy trying to gather a coalition, manages to quiet the room by shouting:

"Who trusts anyone else here? We don't know each other. I barely trust the people who say they're on my side to actually vote as they claim they will. So why in the world are you trusting our gentle leader Nicodemus? He keeps hinting that all he wants is peace, that he values the ideology of some writer who's been dead for five centuries, but I've known plenty of politicians.

"You can't trust words. All you can trust is that people are afraid of losing power. We've gotten here because we've been ruthless. Let's not pretty it up. I tell you this, if you idiots vote to give up the authority that we have earned over this world, you'll be showing yourselves as weak. And this man, this conspiracy? It doesn't need weak people."

Loud arguments erupt after that, but soon Vicemi appears and a hush falls. He tells them to go into the Main Hall for what he calls a "second vote." In truth, this will be the final vote.

Characters who take a long time to go inside the hall notice that the guards who would normally be present are absent; Nicodemus has told them to patrol the exterior of the palace to get them out of the way. Instead, members of the ghost council close the doors behind them. The only ghosts in the main hall are Vicemi, Amielle, and Macbannin.

The Vote

Social. Real-Time.

After final arguments, Nicodemus asks for a vote to decide the Obscurati's new world order.

Nicodemus asks for each faction to send forth one representative to speak on their behalf, and to please keep remarks to 5 minutes or fewer. Barring PC intervention, the three main factions are:

- **MAP Proposal.** The compromise devised by the late Dame Constance, this proposal combines Miller's Pyre, the Arboretum, and the Panarchists, while also appeasing the Trekkers, Long Now, Mortal Mind, and Sky League. It shuffles some planes about, adds a few new ones, and manages to satisfy most of the needs of those groups. Tellingly, it abandons the Miller's Pyre desire of a plane with an Empathy focus, it keeps the Dreaming and Bleak Gate despite what the Arboretum wants, and it leaves the world with no

seal against extraplanar incursion. Cula Ravjahani represents this group.

- **Watchmaker Watchmen.** This novel proposal brings a new habitable world where the Ob leadership and their allies and descendants can live with free will, able to watch over the real world, which will have had its free will removed per the Watchmaker proposal. It would be possible to reopen the seal and restore free will if something went wrong, but this would be such an ordeal that it could not be undertaken lightly. This proposal pleases Aegis, since it protects both worlds from extraplanar incursion. Amielle represents this group, but seems to know that she's going to lose.

- **Colossal Congress.** Based on research into Risur's rites of rulership, this proposal grants the powers of the Colossus proposal to the Obscurati initially, but requires each member to undertake a ritual of affirmation every year. Each member of this colossal congress would have a geographic region where he would need the approval of at least half the residents. The Ob would still be able to solve issues with their mighty powers, but the people could reject leaders they no longer approve of. This proposal satisfies the Weapon-Mongers and the Economists, both of whom favor the inherent competition. Catherine Romana represents this group (and eagerly courts the support of whichever PC is in Livia Hatsfield's body).

Perhaps the PCs have a proposal of their own, or they manage to become the face of one of these three. In general, though, the division in the conspiracy comes down to whether they should ensure a position of power for themselves in the new world.

After the final arguments, Nicodemus takes the stage.

"We all have different ideals, but before we vote I want you to understand what led me to found our organization and pursue this long, grand work. It wasn't a desire to gain power myself, or to punish those who had abused their power. I started down this path because I'd seen that intellect, wisdom, and good intentions were feeble weapons in the face of propaganda and fear.

"The problem with this world is that the dreamers and poets are blind to its real face. It's easy to mock as childish those who grow upset when the world isn't 'fair.' The habit of accepting injustice as the way of the world has become too familiar, and while I shed my innocence long ago, I never fooled myself into thinking it is good that I've had to do these foul things.

"I do think any of these proposals would result in a materially better world. And I will support whichever wins, as will the ghost council. But only one of them will make a world good enough to balance out the evil we'll create to get there."

Nicodemus steps aside, and the vote begins. The board has options for MAP, Watchmen, and Congress, plus Other and Any.





Count.

Let the PCs go last. Not counting their votes, the result is:

- ▶ **MAP.** 17 votes.
- ▶ **Watchmen.** 4 votes.
- ▶ **Congress.** 18 votes.
- ▶ **Other.** 0 votes.
- ▶ **Any.** Nicodemus, plus 25 ghosts.

This tally assumes Zoltan, Constance, and Leone are all dead. (Otherwise they vote for Congress, MAP, and Watchmen respectively.) We leave it to you to decide who among the NPCs the party has interacted with align with each faction. Ideally you'll have some people whom the party likes who end up fleeing when Nicodemus changing his mind.

In any case, the PCs' votes will be the deciding ones.

Ballot Stuffing

Social. Real-Time.

Nicodemus abandons democracy and uses a wayfarer's lantern to distract those he wishes to excise from his conspiracy.

Nicodemus asks Vicemi to verify the final count, then puts on his best smile and thanks everyone for participating in one of the greatest moments in history. He's truly glad, he says, that everyone felt comfortable voting their conscience, and he hopes that they can all work together moving forward. As he speaks, the gaslamps in the room start to turn a soothing blue color.

The party immediately recognizes the effect as being identical to the base of the rift at Knütpara, and if they focus on trying to resist its magic (see page 7) they should be able to keep their wits about them.

Trait: Palace Gaslamp Pacification. There are lamps every 25 feet (5 squares) or so throughout the palace. Whenever a creature ends its turn in the illuminated area (a 10-foot radius around one of the lamps), it must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or fall under the lantern's effect (save ends). An affected creature gets a new save at the end of each of its turns to resist the effects. If a creature fails 3 consecutive saves, it falls fully under the lantern's effect for 5 minutes. When a creature successfully ends 3 consecutive turns unaffected, it becomes resistant, and cannot be affected again by any lantern with the same planar energy for 5 minutes. A creature can choose to let itself be affected by the lantern.

A creature caught in the light is pacified. It cannot take hostile actions, and it treats all creatures as trusted friends. If another creature attacks it, it automatically breaks free of the pacification and cannot be affected again until the end of the encounter.

Through preparatory spells, Nicodemus has made himself and the ghost council immune to this particular effect of the lantern. They'll be able to act freely.

Blue Banquet.

Once Nicodemus is content that everyone is pacified, he asks for those who supported the Colossal Congress proposal to remain in

the main hall while he takes everyone else outside to the grand foyer. Of the prominent NPCs, this includes Vicemi, Han Jierre, Macbannin, Amielle, and Erskine (plus possibly Grappa if he lives).

There awaits the ghost council swarm: a sprawling mass of what must have been a hundred or more people before their wills became subsumed in the collective. When the doors to the main hall are closed, Vicemi says that he has sent the other councilors to secure the premises. The palace is sealed, and the council is ready.

Nicodemus turns to those who came out with him. He says, "Those inside would ruin this world if they were allowed to come into power. In my five centuries I've seen plenty of monarchs and oligarchs just like them who have lashed out when their authority and dominance is threatened. I don't like what we have to do now, but the most efficient way to avert this threat is to strike now. This small dishonorable deed will be balanced by ages of greater prosperity for all of civilization. I need your support in this decision."

Amielle and Macbannin remain impassive, but the rest of the officers in the crowd begin to nod assent. Soon over 20 people, speaking somberly and reasonably, urge Nicodemus to do what must be done.

Maybe He Has a Point.

Nicodemus is moments away from ordering the ghost council to glide through the walls into the main hall and slaughter the 18 officers who voted in favor of the Colossal Congress (plus any PCs who voted with them).

A rational party might realize that showing their true colors right now, in front of all the villains, is a good way to get killed. But it's time to kick off an action scene, so GMs should consider some combination of the following elements to get things moving.

Shoot First.

If the party just up and attacks without explaining who they are (or tries to interfere with the main hall such as by breaking lamps), Vicemi and the ghost council retaliate immediately, but Nicodemus spares a round to try to reason with them, saying that there's no place in the new world for those who would seize power for themselves.

At that point, Pemberton pipes up. Seemingly oblivious to the ongoing battle, Erskine Haffkruger begins to speak with Benedict Pemberton's deep and folksy voice, saying that he's enjoyed spying on this little get-together, but he'd much rather watch the two sides have a fair fight, since he's hoping neither of them win. He explains who the party is and expresses his wish that all those present end up killing each other. Then he activates the duplicant's internal bomb (see below) to kick things off.

Not so Fast.

The party might boldly reveal themselves. Nicodemus is shocked, but asks that they consider working with the Obscurati, rather than trying to stop a new and better world from being created. At some point – especially if the party seems to be leaning toward yes – Pemberton interrupts and says that he paid to see internecine cock-fighting, not a one-sided pig-slaughter. Again, he'll trigger the bomb once he's bored with talking.

Helpless and Calm.

The lanterns might have pacified the party entirely, in which case just before Nicodemus gives the killing order, Pemberton explains that the constables here will be throwing a spanner into his plans. Nicodemus scoffs and says the party can't do anything to stop him; they'll just sit passively and watch. Pemberton responds that getting attacked usually breaks these sorts of charms, and that's when he uses his back-up plan.

Duplicitous Duplicant Detonation.

When Pemberton thinks the time is right, he claps and rubs his hands together, grins, and starts ticking loudly. One round later (at initiative count 0) the ticking accelerates. The round after that he's practically whirring, and at initiative count 0 on the third round he explodes.

During the countdown, first he points out that while the ghosts might not mind a little pyrotechnics, most of the conspirators are nice and full of fleshy bits. Then he tells Erskine to say bye-bye, and leaves the confused dwarf in charge of his duplicant for a moment before it explodes (50 foot-radius burst, 10d6 fire damage plus 5d6 piercing damage, DC 18 Dexterity saving throw for half).

The Splinter Cell

Action. Montage.

The ghost council attacks, Ob officers turn on each other, and the losing side runs for shore.

In this scene, all hell breaks loose in the Obscurati palace. The simplest version simply sees the party fleeing and perhaps contacting their ship via their communication rings. It can then use the fey portal pad to transition into the Bleak Gate for 5 minutes, long enough for the party to rush on board. At some point during their escape Vicemi and the ghost council attack, and Macbannin comes to their aid.

But there are many other objectives the party might have: rescuing sympathetic Ob officers, killing Ob loyalists, freeing Vitus Sigismund from the prison portal painting, and whatever else the constables have come to care about. Also, if they did not prepare to have their ship extract them, they'll need to rejigger the wayfarer lighthouse if they want to transfer to the real world.

Finally, the party is likely not in their own bodies. They might want to take a moment to get back into themselves, which would require one round for each body that needs to be removed from the absurdist web, and then just a free action to break the wreath that binds the two together. The PC will be restored immediately, and both he and the vessel will be helpless for one round. If the party doesn't just coup de grâce the vessel bodies (hopefully not Livia, though), they'll just flee in terror, since they have barely any idea where they are.

Enemy Defenders.

When Pemberton's duplicant explodes, the loyal Ob officers have already scattered. Right afterward Vicemi orders the ghost council swarm into the Main Hall. Vicemi then disappears, teleporting back to the council room. He intends to attack only once he has

regrouped and has back-up. Most of the exits of the building are watched by senior ghost councilors. A shadowlisk is stationed the front exit, another at the rear by the lighthouse. A third shadowlisk guards the entrance to the room that has the prison portal painting, on the first floor west wing hallway.

Unless the party goes looking for multiple groups of enemies at once, it's suggested that GMs stagger their encounters as follows.

Saving Congress.

(Encounter Level 14)

Enemies: Ghost Council Swarm, Cula Ravjahani

Possible Allies: Catherine Romana

In the main hall, 18 Ob officers who voted for the Colossal Congress (including Catherine Romana) wait passively. Unless the party intercedes, the ghost council swarm glides in through the doors, uses a bonus action to seal one of the far exits with a wall of force, and starts killing two officers per round with its incorporeal touches. Cula Ravjahani follows the swarm in from the foyer, and engages the party, hoping they'll focus on her and let the ghosts do their work.

Catherine Romana manages to shake off the pacifying effect in the first round, and since she didn't witness what happened in the foyer she might attack the party in confusion. The rest of the officers here don't fight back or even flee until they are attacked, unless the lanterns in the room (4 in total) are destroyed. Even then, they're not particularly effective in a fight against ghosts.

They'll flee in a panic in different directions unless directed. If rallied, their combined mix of magic and weapons only manages to deal 2 damage per officer per round, but it might add up.

The party is still probably in their vessel bodies. The ghost council fights until it reaches HP Threshold 1, at which point it splinters, leaving behind two ghost councilors. It withdraws and seeks guidance from Vicemi, but will return later. Cula will try to flee with the ghost council, but likely goes down here.

Afterward, the party might enlist Catherine's aid. She recommends they use the lighthouse to transition to the real world, then commandeering a ship to escape.

Exit Blocked.

(Encounter Level 14)

Enemies: 1 shadowlisk, 6 senior ghost councilors

Possible Allies: Amielle Latimer, 12 Obscurati arcane marksmen

Perhaps the party tries to lead the way out of the palace, or they respond after hearing panicked Ob officers scream as they're blasted into shadows by shadowlisks. Whatever exit the party tries to go out through, a similar group of defenders will try to stop them.

The ghost councilors try to possess PCs and move them into the gaze of the shadowlisk. They're fearless about combat because they know they'll rejuvenate even if destroyed.

It's likely that Amielle Latimer, who fled when Pemberton's bomb went off, returns with a squad of Obscurati arcane marksmen, who fire a fusillade into the shadowlisk. Once the fight's over, she can lend advice like reminding them of the three ships patrolling the waters around the island. She explains that she cannot go with them; she's bound to stay near the ghost council. But she wants them to get to safety. Sadly she's not as big an idealist

Pacing and Resting.

This scene likely involves multiple combat encounters over a relatively short timespan. Consider that 5 minutes can pass pretty quickly if the party is talking with NPCs or deciding which way to go, which can give the party time to heal and cast preparatory spells. Even if the party insists on rushing, they can probably have an occasional 1-minute break to tend to their needs.

Escaping Officers.

The PCs might not be the only ones trying to escape. Based on how much havoc the party is causing, the Ob officers who allied with Nicodemus might run for the shore. Some will link up with Han Jierre who uses a wayfarer's lantern to get everyone onto a fast schooner in the real world. Others might just try to get onto the *Nighthawk*-class steamships, some being so desperate they dive into the treacherous waters.

Failure States.

If the party gets taken down here, there's no logical reason Nicodemus or Vicemi would choose to keep them alive as prisoners. The GM might be able to wrangle a last-minute rescue by Macbannin and Amielle (or other officers they befriended), getting the party onto their ship, which barely escapes. If the party is out of allies, though, and the GM doesn't want to end the campaign, the next adventure starts with the party linking up with Asrabey Varal, and if anyone has the clout to burst into a stronghold of bad guys and carry off a few people, it's him.

as Nicodemus, and while intellectually his argument makes sense, she can't help but value her friends in the Ob, and won't abide their slaughter.

Lighthouse Defense.

(Encounter Level 12)

Enemies: 2 senior ghost councilors, 4 Obscurati arcane marksmen

The lighthouse is not particularly well defended, though the marksmen will hear freight elevator ascending, and can take a ladder down to some sniper perches inside the lighthouse so they can fire down at the party.

Chaotic Halls.

(Encounter Level 12)

Enemies: 9 Obscurati bookpin guards, 4 Obscurati arcane marksmen

If the party is having too easy a time, GMs might throw a squad of bookpin guards in their path. Ideally the guards advance on the party from two different directions while the marksmen laying down suppressing fire. The enemies aren't particularly challenging, but the players might think they're in more trouble than they really are.

Prison Break.

(Encounter Level 14)

Enemies: 1 shadowlisk, 1 senior ghost councilor, ghost council swarm stage 2

Possible Allies: Vitus Sigismund

The door hangs open to the downstairs west wing suite that contains the prison portal painting. Inside, though, a ghost councilor

floats at the ceiling, and a shadowlisk is coiled to spring from the bathroom (where the painting is). Moments after the battle begins, the ghost council swarm (now at Stage 2) flies in through the window. It uses wall of force to divide the party, then grabs one or two PCs and tries to carry them back out the window and up to the roof.

To add some drama, GMs can have the fighting damage the frame of the portal painting, which causes the world within to begin to disintegrate. The party have only three rounds to get Vitus (and maybe the other prisoners) to safety before the demiplane becomes a lethal vacuum.

The ghost council fights until it reaches its second HP Threshold, then dives back into the palace and flees to Vicemi.

Panicked Evacuation

Action. Real-Time.

Numerous ships try to flee, prompting a chaotic, multi-sided battle between the real world and the Bleak Gate.

Honestly, the party will likely be spent and ready to leave after their confrontation with Vicemi, so the GM might simply gloss over their departure from the island so as not to end anti-climactically. The Obscurati officers who did manage to escape board *Naphaeon*, a frigate which flees from the island's north docks, trying to avoid combat completely and get back to Vendricce, where it will receive protection by the Clergy's navy. Three Nighthawk-class steamships will try to intercept the party's ship, battling them in dark waters dotted with dangerous rocky spires.

If the party befriended the ghost pirates, their ship can emerge and aid the party. Remember that the party's ship can only stay in the Bleak Gate for so long without taking damage. The party might board and go back to the real world, or they could try to stick around and sink the *Naphaeon*.

Naphaeon, Obscurati Frigate

Huge Level 17 Vehicle (110,000 gp)

Hull Integrity 4; Defense 25

Maneuverability 4; Speed 14

Crew 32, minimum 8; Total Complement 200

DESIGN

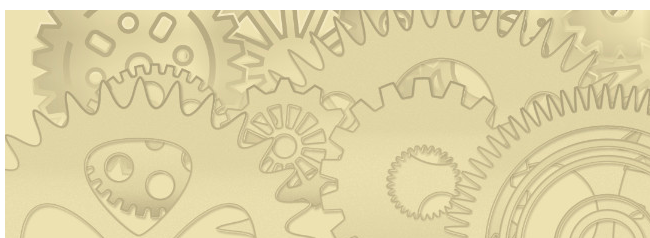
Length 170 ft.; Beam 35 ft.

Masts 3, each 100 ft. high; Decks 4.

ARMAMENT

Cannons. To each broadside, 11 light cannons on the maindeck and 12 full cannons on the gundeck. In a chase, the crew moves and turns the cannons on the maindeck to fire forward or aftward.

Crew: 100. Attack: +10 to broadsides, or +8 fore or aft.



Nighthawk-Class Steamship

Large Level 16 Vehicle (104,920 gp)

Hull Integrity 3; Defense 15

Maneuverability 12; Speed 6

Crew 28, minimum 2 (see Autocrew)

Perception +8

DESIGN

Length 85 feet; Beam 25 feet

Masts 0 (steam engine); Decks 3

TRAITS

Autocrew. Aside from the captain, navigator, engineer, and gunner, the crew consists of 24 mindless humanoid automatons.

Extrplanar Magnetometer & Spectral Searchlight. Next to the navigator's compass, an arcane instrument detects the fluctuations caused by nearby metal, providing a crude sensor that can detect ships—even ones in the real world. A gimbal-mounted searchlight on the prow uses *wayfarer's lantern* technology to allow the *Nighthawk* to attack while remaining in the Bleak Gate.

The crew is always aware of the presence of ships within one mile, and if they lack line of sight (or are on a different plane) they can make a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check each round to set a course toward medium range of a ship the crew is aware of.

Once within medium range (500 feet) the *Nighthawk* can use its spotlight to locate one ship at a time, as long as it's to the fore or sides, not aft. The *Nighthawk* can target a ship located in this way with its weapons, even if the two ships are on different planes. In return, a ship located by the spotlight can fire on the *Nighthawk*, but it has disadvantage if it isn't on the same plane. The spotlight can be targeted and destroyed.

Clever Defenses. Special iron shutters keep the crew safe from enemy fire without limiting the *Nighthawk's* ability to fire back. The crew always has cover against attacks made from outside the ship.

Tar and Brimstone Sheathing. An alchemical mixture of components slathered on the hull protects the bottom of the ship. *Passwall* and similar effects cannot affect the hull. Any creature that attacks the hull from beneath the water takes 10 points of fire damage.

Eldritch Shield. An arcane forcefield powered by the ship's engine wards off attacks. Any spell that originates more than 50 feet from the ship has any damage it deals to creatures aboard the ship reduced by 20. Attacks from within that range function normally.

ARMAMENT

Wayfarer's Cannon. Thin slivers of light are visible through the shutters on the turret at the ship's prow. After it fires, observers can see mechanical constructs reloading the twin cannons with huge munitions that have glowing amberglass shells.

Crew: 20. Attack: +12, forward only. Each round choose one of the following effects:

- **Flaming.** Attack inflicts the burning condition instead of normal damage. Crew in a struck area take 2d6 fire damage.
- **Radiant.** Attack explodes with positive energy, dealing normal damage to undead creatures in struck areas, but not harming the ship itself.
- **Shocking.** Gains a +2 bonus to hit creatures. Against ships, the first strike of any attack deals no damage to the ship itself (later hits deal normal damage). However, crew in struck components take an extra 1d6 lightning damage.



The Ghost Ship of Mutravir Island

Large Level 10 Vehicle (39,000 gp)

Hull Integrity 3; **Defense** 15

Maneuverability 6; **Speed** 8

Crew 16, minimum 4; **Total Complement** 60

DESIGN

Length 90 feet; **Beam** 25 feet

Masts 3, each 70 ft. high; **Decks** 2

TRAITS

Ghost Ship. It glides through the shoals, ignoring the hazardous rocks as it brings its cannons to bear.

The ship and those aboard it glide through solid objects like a ghost. Each turn, the captain chooses whether the ship is incorporeal or manifested. If manifested, it functions normally. If incorporeal, it has disadvantage on its attack rolls, and attacks against it have disadvantage. Additionally, the incorporeal ship ignores hazards and obstacles.

ARMAMENT

Cannons. A small array of light cannons, five to either broadside, but they strike with the wrathful might of the dead.

Crew: 40. Attack: +5, broadsides only.

Showdown

Action. Tactical. High Level.

Vicemi bends all his might toward defeating the party.

Enemies: Vicemi Terio, 1 advanced bleak golem, 3 Obscurati bookpin guards, 3 ghost councilors, ghost council swarm stage 3

Possible Allies: Reed Macbannin

Perhaps the party is running down a hallway toward an exit, or they're descending the stairs to the cliff south of the lighthouse, or they're riding a carriage toward the north docks to get onto their ship. A fog begins to spread in their path, and in the dark and mist they hear the clanking sounds of an approaching golem.

Vicemi uses *cloudkill* to create a swath of poisonous vapors in the party's path, then waits on the far side with an advanced bleak golem (he had to go get it from storage) and a trio of bookpin guards who have remained steadfast. The ghost council also lurks somewhere nearby, preferably separated by a solid wall so the party cannot see it.

Vicemi calls through the fog, "We've had enough talking this past day. All I ask is this. Don't surrender." Then the ghost council swarm swoops in and attacks.

If Macbannin has not made his appearance yet, he shows up right before the swarm strikes. He'll try to aid the party, and he'll cuss at them if they attack him.

Tactics.

The ghost council just swarms the party, causing as much havoc as possible. The bleak golem advances with two bookpin guards right beside it. A third guard stays with Vicemi, remaining at the edge of the mist.

After one round, the three senior ghost councilors emerge from the mist, focusing on any solitary or vulnerable foe.

Vicemi has likely already used *protection from energy* to ward

Battling Nicodemus.

We don't present stats for Nicodemus here. Partially because he'll be designed to fit the needs of a different encounter in Adventure Eight, *Diaspora*, and mainly because he's effectively unkillable here. Assume he has an AC in the mid-20s and that damage dealt to him instead transfers to the ghost council swarm. Until the party defeats it, Nicodemus cannot be hurt. Also, he has a custom *contingency* that will teleport him off the island and to a safehouse in Vendricce with just a single word.

Don't bother having Nicodemus fight back; you don't want the players thinking they can beat him. If he's attacked, he begins to concentrate on a spell to retaliate when something intercedes.

If the party's true identity has been revealed, Nicodemus's voice changes accent and timbre to that of Andrei, who says, "These are not yours to harm." Nicodemus shakes his head, realizes he can't risk fighting in this condition, and activates his *contingency*.

If the party just up and attacks, maybe have Nicodemus spend a round venting anger and expressing disbelief until Vicemi snarls at him that he, Nicodemus, is too important to risk, at which Nicodemus grudgingly leaves. It might irk your players, but they have plenty of enemies to deal with already, and they'll get another crack at the mastermind next adventure.

against whatever energy the party uses most. He stays at the edge of the mist, where he has concealment, and leads with *haste*, then uses his powerful offensive spells. If he sees the party benefiting from magical defenses he'll target those with *dispel magic*.

Macbannin sticks near the party and uses *bestow curse* to make the ghost council lose its incorporeal subtype. He realizes that he cannot leave the ghost council, and that they'll probably do horrible things to him once the council reforms, so when the time is right he'll plunge a dagger into his own throat and begin to fade away. When he perishes, he uses one final curse to ensure that Vicemi won't rejuvenate if destroyed.

Loot.

When Vicemi is destroyed, his *ghostly entourage bracelet* falls to the ground with a clatter (see Part 3, Appendix).

Aftermath.

When Vicemi is destroyed, he doesn't speak; he just glares at the party as his form disintegrates. Hopefully the fight will have exhausted the party enough that they won't feel the urge to track down all the remaining Ob officers and exterminate them. At any rate, the wards on the island that kept the horrors of the Bleak Gate at bay are starting to fade, so dawdling can be deadly.

Even if the party does kill every last Ob officer here, Nicodemus will return to the island and capture the essences of all the officers who perished here, giving them the option to join the ghost council. Then he'll be able to connect with whoever is second-in-command in the various cells.

Macbannin and Vicemi are likely gone, but Amielle survives (and her disapproval of Nicodemus is probably not apparent). This has been a massive set-back, but the conspiracy was designed to survive catastrophic damage, and as long as they can gain control of the colossus, they can still enact their grand design. 🐉



THE GRAND DESIGN

Our organization, though composed of powerful industrialists and brilliant thinkers the world over, has operated with little communication between cells. Though we all desire to change the world, you should be realizing that the scope of change possible to us demands that we not let any one person make the decisions.

Our leader Nicodemus has called you together to listen to proposals, debate their merits, and choose the spirit of the next age.

The Method of Change.

As mentioned, our world is linked to eight planes. This connection was set by a ritual performed several thousand years ago, which buried eight stone pillars underground on Axis Island. Those pillars were then sealed beneath a plate of gold 200 feet in diameter and nearly 3 feet thick.

To get access to the ritual pillars, we designed the mechanical colossus that has been making the news lately. It was activated earlier than we wanted; nevertheless, we are bringing it to a location where we can free it from the Dreaming. As soon as we have it on the right world and under our control, we'll proceed with altering the Axis Seal ritual.

The changes will affect the whole world, but to help transition between the two worlds, we are constructing lighthouses, towers, and similar tall monuments, all equipped with magic lanterns. By triggering these all simultaneously we'll create a field of stability. In the event something does go wrong, we'll be able to abort the ritual at any moment prior to its completion.

Planar Primer.

Each plane tied to the world we live on has aspects that distinguish it from any old plane with an elemental trait. For example, while the Plane of Air is vast, and many worlds are carved from slivers of it, some of those slivers have storms, others are filled with birds, and some are smoky and concealing. The nature of each plane determines what traits it lends to our world.

It seems that when the Ancients decided what worlds ours would be connected to, they did not care much for traits. Indeed, many of these planes are fairly mundane, and our organization has access to many more impressive options.

1. **Jiese, Plane of Fire.** Its trait is Cunning. The fire from this plane is less destructive than a typical elemental world, and its flames can be used intelligently, like a tool. Our scholars suspect most worlds never achieve the industrial revolution ours has because they lack this trait. Changing this plane might stymie technological progress.
2. **Avilona, Plane of Air.** This world appears to have been damaged since it was originally tied to our world, so now its trait is Calm. Changing this plane might lead to stronger storms, and could make the world in general more energetic and changing.
3. **Av, Plane of Life.** This glassy hollow world is our moon and has the traits of Reflection and Dream. It allows our world to have the two parallel planes of fey and darkness, known as The Dreaming and The Bleak Gate. Changing this world would remove those parallel planes and might have consequences involving dreams and undead.

4. **Mavisha, Plane of Water.** Its trait is Mystery, and it is responsible for the many islands that dot the world with their various secrets. We think this trait can be easily abandoned.
5. **Urim, Plane of Earth.** This golden world has fractured into many pieces, but its trait - Barrier - causes gold in our world to block teleportation.
6. **Apet, Plane of Space.** The Distant Plane is responsible for keeping our world and its bonded planes far from the rest of the multiverse, less likely to attract extraplanar attention.
7. **Reida, Plane of Time.** Most scholars don't even realize that the incomplete silvery ring that surrounds Apet is another plane altogether. Its traits of Limited Fate allow for prophecy, but enforce that after a given time the world must change. We suggest caution in tampering with this plane, but experiments show such efforts are possible.
8. **Nem, Plane of Death.** Its trait is Annihilation, and it destroys any who try to travel from our star system of planes to the outer multiverse, and vice versa.

The Cardinal Rule.

It is risky to directly alter behavior or personality. Free will is an all-or-nothing option, and we cannot force people to be "good" without also turning them into automatons. We can, however, nudge people, and you'll see some example options below.

Proposals and Voting.

The leadership of our group has five proposals we would like you to consider. We encourage you to come up with revisions or even new proposals. We suspect different factions will emerge, and whatever design we agree on will no doubt demand some compromise and disappointment.

Our initial five factions are:

- **The Arboretum.** Order nature so it can spread and be controlled like industry.
- **Colossus.** Grant ourselves semi-divine powers to fix problems as they arise.
- **Miller's Pyre.** Enact subtle changes, focused on making people more empathetic and less susceptible to hypocrisy, so they can more easily pursue goodness and justice.
- **Panarchists.** Grant individuals enough power to make governments unnecessary.
- **Watchmakers.** Eliminate free will and design a thousand-year destiny of progress for the world.

Tonight you will meet the representatives of each faction, and then we will hold a preliminary vote to see which proposal holds the most support. This evening and tomorrow morning will be opportunities to make coalitions and alterations. Starting tomorrow afternoon we will grant everyone who desires a chance to speak, and by the end of the evening we hope to hold a second vote.

For a proposal to win, it must have support of at least seventy-five percent of the officers in attendance. Including the leadership there are forty-nine officers present, and an additional twenty-seven votes are given to the ghost council, which has a tradition of voting as one. Thus, out of seventy-six voters, a proposal must get the support of 57 officers.



MINOR AND RADICAL FACTIONS

BY THE MORNING OF THE SECOND day of the convocation, you're aware of the following minor factions, and rumors say some people are organizing a few radical factions in secret, hoping to push for things that might not be approved by the majority of the Obscurati.

Minor Factions.

- ▶ **Aegis.** The current planes prevent invasion from other worlds, and it has worked well so far. Aegis insists that if the current planes of Space and Death – which are the source of that protection – are changed, that some other defenses be put in their place. Represented by Dengar Kriegshaff, human wizard of Drakr.
- ▶ **Bards.** This faction wants people to have a more discerning taste when it comes to entertainment, and for performers to constantly seek to hone their craft. Represented by Praesidia de Vaca, half-dragon bard of Ber.
- ▶ **Economists.** This group wants people to have a stronger sense of the value of things and a more intuitive grasp of economics. They hope this will lead to more workers participating meaningfully in a new industrialized economy, rather than wasting money or time on things that are traditional but less utilitarian. Represented by Solace Petrov, human economist of Elfaiivar.
- ▶ **The Long Now.** People live a long time, but typically plan only for the short term. This faction wishes to find a Plane of Time that will make people consider a longer timespan in their decisions. Represented by Zartan Arkel, human druid of Drakr.
- ▶ **Mortal Mind.** This faction opposes all religion as a distraction from the enlightenment of the mortal mind. They desire a world where people reject religion. Such mind control is not doable, so their plan is to eliminate people's ability to feel religious awe, creating a much more rational existence. Represented by Von Hastenschrieft Willi-markanova, dwarf philosopher of Drakr.
- ▶ **The Sky League.** Make flight possible, preferably easy. If it is feasible, they would like to be able to fly constantly, without need of casting spells. Represented by Dame Constance Baden, human knight of Danor.

- ▶ **Trekkers.** Not content to limit mortal races to a single world, this faction wants to choose planes that are habitable. Represented by Cardinal Testamenta Suchdol, human inquisitor of Crisillyir.
- ▶ **Weapon-Mongers.** Believing that technological progress is of great value, this faction wants to ensure that whatever new world is created is not one of pathetic peace and harmony, where invention and innovation is stifled by the lack of war. Represented by Glaz du Sang Magie, human ice mage of Danor.

Radical Factions.

- ▶ **Amorals.** This highly philosophical faction questions whether anyone ought to decide what is of value in a new world. They suspect that the initial bonding of this world to other planes created an artificial sense of morality and value. If we can change what people value simply by altering the nature of reality, what makes us think our own morality is not also enforced? They propose not linking to any specific planes, but instead letting our world be loosely connected to the entire multiverse. This would be the only way for people to be truly free to determine their own ideology, without outside influence.
- ▶ **Celestial Bureaucracy.** This faction suggests the world should be linked to a plane inhabited by just and noble angels, which will guide the mortal races and provide judgment, since we do such a poor job of it.
- ▶ **Humble Hook.** This faction rejects the major goal of the Obscurati. While they support making the world better, they say it is every individual's challenge in life to make him- or herself better. They do not think it is their place to try to alter reality on such a fundamental level. Convinced that the purpose of life is thus to prevail over adversity, they fear that making the world "a better place" will actually eliminate the meaning of life.
- ▶ **Materialists.** This faction believes that magic is irrational and creates too many problems. They suggest reducing the power of magic as much as possible.
- ▶ **Nationalists.** There are supposedly several patriots who want to make sure their home nation profits most from the new world order.
- ▶ **The White Tongue.** Rumors suggest that an unknown number of Obscurati members have made a pact with the fey titan known as the Voice of Rot, which seeks to gain power by letting the world die.