

THE DM TOOL CHEST

CRIMSON SHADOWS

THE SHATTERED CORE PART 2

A SAFEHAVEN FOR SORCORERS HAS FALLEN UNDER THE SHADOW OF CULTISTS
CONSPIRING TO DESTROY A NEW AETHER TRAIN

CRIMSON SHADOWS

LUMINARY HAVEN

C*rimson Shadows: The Shattered Core Part 2* is a Fifth Edition adventure for **three to five characters of 3rd to 4th level**, optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 3**. Explore the magical town of Luminary Haven in a race against time to uncover a sinister plot and stop a devastating explosion.

This adventure is part two of a two-part series that takes the characters through 3rd to 4th level. The series takes place in the Etheria steam and sorcery campaign setting, a wild frontier struggling for survival after being ripped apart by a cataclysmic event. Here, arcane magitech and untamed wilderness clash in an unending battle for dominance.

ADVENTURE RULES

The 5th Edition core rulebooks are recommended to run this adventure. You can get a free copy of the 5th Edition System Reference Document (SRD) and basic rule set online and use them instead of the core books.

A boxed description like this should be read aloud or paraphrased for the players. These suggested prompts may be used or disregarded at the GM's discretion.

This adventure has references pointing to information found outside the module. Magic items, spells, and equipment are *italicized*, and descriptions are located in either the core rulebooks or the 5th Edition SRD.

NPC and creature names are **bolded** to indicate the stat block needed for combat. These statistics are in the core 5th edition monster guidebook, the 5th Edition SRD, or presented in an attached Appendix.

BACKGROUND

Luminary Haven is a city known for its peace, tranquility, and advanced technology blending with the natural environment. Located in the heart of the Emerald Canopy, it's a refuge for sorcerers who can harness the ambient Aetherium energy prevalent in Etheria and a home to the aetheric druids holding back the mutated wilderness. Here, nature coexists with technology, creating a unique blend of organic and artificial elements.

However, beneath this tranquility lurks a dangerous threat. Luminary Haven is about to unveil a new subterranean aether train that links the town to the industrious city of Rustique, promoting connectivity and progress. But unknown to many, it has also become the target of a dangerous cult known as the Crimson Cogs. The origins of this threat trace back to Iron Heights,

where the inventor, Balthazar Gearwright, had his experimental aethercore—a source of immense arcane energy—stolen from his secured workshop. This theft was the handiwork of the Storm Jackals, notorious thieves and ruthless thugs who terrorized Iron Heights in recent months. Balthazar hired a group of adventurers to retrieve the stolen aethercore after capturing an image of one of the thieves on an invention.

As the adventurers delved into the Emerald Canopy, they discovered the remains of the slaughtered bandits. They learned that the assault was orchestrated by the Crimson Cogs, who initially hired the thieves to steal the Aethercore. The cult blames wild aetherborn sorcerers for the catastrophic Sundering. They intend to use the stolen aethercore to build a devastating weapon against Luminary Haven, where they have gathered together for protection.

The plot thickens in Luminary Haven with the involvement of Varek Embereye, the subway project's lead engineer. Unbeknownst to others, Varek is secretly allied with the Crimson Cogs. His knowledge of the subway system and access to the aetherite mines places him in a unique position to maximize the damage to both Luminary Haven's leadership and economy. Varek's work in building the subway has kept him from suspicion by his colleagues, but rumors on the streets hint at something amiss.

With the public unveiling of the subway approaching, including an inaugural trip by the city's leadership, the adventurers must act swiftly. They must uncover the conspiracy, track down the stolen Aethercore, and prevent a potential catastrophe.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Upon arriving in Luminary Haven, the adventurers liaise with Professor Selena Lyras, a local aether scientist, to get briefed on the situation involving the stolen Aethercore. Their investigation starts as they explore various city locations, such as the marketplace and grand library, to gather information about the Crimson Cogs and their possible connections within Luminary Haven. Clues and rumors lead them to the city's new subway system, where signs of sabotage hint towards the involvement of its lead engineer, Varek Embereye. Searching his workshop uncovers detailed plans involving the nearby aetherite mine and train tunnels. Their journey leads them to the Aetherite Mines, where they navigate dangerous passages, rescue trapped miners, confront hostile creatures, and finally engage in a tense showdown to prevent a deadly explosion.

The adventure is divided into two parts:

Part 1: The Investigation. The party arrives in Luminary Haven and meets with Councilor Selena Lyras to kick off the search for the Crimson Cogs. After exploring the town and gathering information, the characters discover rumors of malfunctioning machines, increasing tension and fighting, and learn about the

new underground aether train set to open soon. A visit to the train station results in an attack by hijacked mechanical guards and a clue pointing to the train's Chief Engineer.

Part 2: Race Against Time. The party investigates Chief Engineer Varek Embereye, finding his workshop ransacked, hinting at an abduction. Amidst the chaos, they discover maps linking the aether train's tunnels to nearby crystal mines. The party journeys again through the treacherous Emerald Canopy and into the aetherite mine, where they encounter injured miners and menacing creatures. In the mines' heart, they discover a chilling scene: cultists are arming an Aethercore bomb, preparing to ignite the energy within the aetherite crystals.

ABOUT LUMINARY HAVEN

Perched amid the lush, verdant expanse of the Emerald Canopy, Luminary Haven is a vibrant town where the wonders of aether sorcery and nature thrive in splendid harmony. After the catastrophic Sundering and the Aetherstorm, this city emerged as a beacon of hope and sanctuary for those able to manipulate aetherium, providing respite from the prejudice and fear they encountered elsewhere.

Luminary Haven is nestled within and around massive trees, their trunks serving as foundations for dwellings, research labs, and the hubs of the city's communal life. Buildings blend organic and arcane, with some grown from plants and fungi, while others are intricate steel and stone constructed using innovative technology. The cityscape is interwoven with bridges and platforms, connecting the various districts and offering stunning views of the luminescent city and the surrounding jungle.

Under the stewardship of the Conclave of Stars, the city thrives, humming with arcane power and vibrant life. However, it also houses its share of troubles. Wild aether surges occasionally disrupt the harmony, causing beautiful and hazardous anomalies. The surrounding jungle, teeming with exotic and sometimes dangerous creatures, poses a constant threat that keeps the town's druidic defenders on their toes.

The relationship between the city and the neighboring aetherite mines is symbiotic but not frictionless. Disputes between miners and city authorities over resource distribution and working conditions are not uncommon, adding another layer of complexity to Luminary Haven's socio-political landscape.

The city's lifeblood is the ambient Aetherium energy that permeates every corner, giving Luminary Haven a distinct, vibrant glow, especially noticeable after sundown when the town seems to come alive with a magic all its own. Newcomers often need time to acclimate to the constant magical field, but it's hard to ignore the city's ethereal charm once they do. For further details, refer to the *Etheria: Rage of the Aetherstorm* campaign setting sourcebook.



ABOUT THE CRIMSON COGS

The Crimson Cogs are a secretive cult composed primarily of former scholars, ex-soldiers, and mercenary hunters. They firmly believe that the Astromagi's descendants are the primary cause of Etheria's turmoil ever since the Sundering brought about the Aetherstorm. Their main objective is to obstruct any possibility of a resurgence of the Astromagi Dominion out of fear that unregulated arcane exploration will cause further catastrophes.

The organization is led by The Grand Gear, an elusive figure always masked with a crimson cog design. The Grand Gear has a reputation for being an effective leader, able to rally their followers with persuasive speeches and strategic planning. Rumors hint at a past as a scholar who lost their family to the Aetherstorm.

The Crimson Cogs conduct operations from hidden bases in the Expanse, with influences spreading across Etheria. They specialize in espionage and guerrilla tactics, infiltrating groups sympathetic to the ancient Astromagi beliefs, especially in Luminary Haven. They have interfered with the aetherite mining and the city's magitech devices, amplifying the growing conflict between miners and city officials. These actions are causing widespread suspicion and discord among Luminary Haven's citizens.

The group's primary operative in this adventure is Korvis Threefingers. A seasoned saboteur, Threefingers is a half-elf bearing a prominent facial scar working with Varek Embereye to coordinate an attack on the sanctuary's leadership. Operating from the shadows, he's responsible for orchestrating the theft of the Aethercore from the Storm Jackals. He has also been tampering with magitech devices throughout Luminary Haven to distract the citizens from their actual goals.



CRIMSON COG CULTIST



PART 1

THE INVESTIGATION

The adventure kicks off with the party having been sent by Balthazar Gearwright to meet with Councilor Selena Lyras, a member of the Conclave of Stars and arcane engineer. Once the party arrives in Luminary Haven, read aloud the following:

Luminary Haven emerges from the Emerald Canopy, a town of gleaming metal intertwined with lush greenery. The city pulsates with radiant energy, bathing its bustling streets in a soft, ethereal light. The hum of arcane technology mingles with the chatter of its inhabitants, and the air smells of sizzling street food and rich jungle flowers. Terraces overflow with colorful flora, adding splashes of color to the luminescent cityscape. aetherite-powered devices flit about, illuminating the city or delivering messages and goods. A massive building topped with a spire stands in the center of the town, its shimmering peak rising above the treetops.

As you take in the view, a guard in white livery steps forward and says he has orders to bring you to Councilwoman Selena Lyras, who is expecting you. He points to the nearby spire and motions to follow him.

The party can choose to visit the town before the councilor (see the “Exploring the Town” section), and the guard only responds that it’s in their best interest to visit her as soon as possible. Once the characters arrive at the Counselor’s office, read aloud:

Inside the spire is the hustle and bustle of workers that only an administration building can produce. The guard leads towards a pair of grand metal doors just a short distance from the entrance. Behind a large, intricate desk stands an elven woman whose raven-black hair shimmers blue in the same light that glints off a clockwork arm. Her eyes, a bright amethyst, stare at you intently, assessing your capabilities in a single glance. She reaches out her hand, the mechanical one, in greeting. “Thank you for coming, adventurers. I have heard much about you from our mutual friend,” she says and motions for you to sit in one of the many chairs. “Now, we have much to discuss about this aethercore.”

Councilor Lyras received a message from Balthazar before the party’s arrival and has been expecting them. She is already privy to the theft of the Aethercore and has personal experience with the Crimson Cogs; she

barely escaped with her life after losing her arm in a run-in with the cultists.

The Councilor also provides further guidance to the party:

- “There are several well-informed people in the marketplace. Leyna is an alchemist who runs Vapor and Vial. She’s a good listener and a frequent gossip who might have heard something.”
- “The Starlight Tavern has a colorful crowd. The bartender Fizz SparkleFizz has a knack for overhearing gossip. Be gentle with him, though. He’s got a good heart.”
- “The Quill & Scroll is a treasure trove of knowledge. Kaelis Inkfeather, the chief librarian, has an uncanny memory for books and documents. If there’s something to learn about the Crimson Cogs, he’d be the one to ask.”
- “And of course, if you’re seeking help from the town officials, show them this,” she says, handing the party a small silver badge with the emblem of a rotating gear enveloped by an intricate crystal wreath. “This is my personal crest. They know me and my work here, and they’ll be more likely to cooperate.”

She offers these last pieces of advice, “Remember to be tactful. People here are kind but they respect directness and honesty. And be careful, Luminary Haven might seem tranquil but it’s not without its dangers. Good luck, adventurers.”

COUNCILOR SELENA LYRAS

Councilor Selena (lawful-good, elf **engineer**) is a middle-aged elf with striking raven-black hair and bright, amethyst eyes. Her right arm is a magitech prosthetic made from a metallic alloy infused with aetherite crystals. She wears elegant yet practical clothing and carries an assortment of mechanical tools. Selena is passionate about her city and its people. She is quick-witted, observant, and pragmatic, valuing intellect and innovation. Her violent history with the Crimson Cogs motivates her to help the party however they need.

Ideal. “Invention and imagination can change the world. I strive for progress, not perfection.”

Bond. “I owe my life to Luminary Haven, and I will do whatever I can to protect my home.”

Flaw. “I trust in machines and logic above all else, sometimes to the point of dismissiveness towards things I don’t fully understand.”

EXPLORING THE TOWN

At this point in the adventure, the characters have free rein to explore Luminary Haven. They should be encouraged to interact with the locals, investigate Selena's leads, and explore new locations. As they make their way through their investigation, they can learn clues that help them discover the truth behind the Crimson Cogs' plans. When the adventure text calls for it, roll a d10 on the Haven Rumors table below or choose a hint that the characters have yet to learn.

HAVEN RUMORS

d10 Information

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|----|---|
| 1 | "The automaton street sweepers were malfunctioning yesterday. Made a terrible mess rather than cleaning it up. Doesn't bode well for those engineers who swagger around town." |
| 2 | "Did you hear about the grand opening of the aether train to Rustique? There's a lot of excitement, but some are concerned. They say the aetherite used in the rail lines is unstable and risky." |
| 3 | "There was an unfortunate accident at the new aether train station last week. An aether surge took a worker's life. The aetherite is getting more volatile." |
| 4 | "Tempers are high lately and brawls have been breaking out in local taverns. Broken furniture and bruised faces all around. There's talk of hidden agitators stirring up trouble." |
| 5 | "My cousin down at the aetherite mine says there's something weird going on. He mentioned mechanical malfunctions and engineers having issues with system failures." |
| 6 | "They're called the Crimson Cogs, and they hate aetherborn sorcerers. They hide in plain sight among the locals before striking hard and disappearing back into the shadows." |
| 7 | "Ever since they announced the opening of the new aether train, there's been one wild aether surge after another. People are starting to think it's not a coincidence." |
| 8 | "Been hearing reports that there's been an increase in attacks in the Canopy by creatures never seen before. Something is riling them up." |
| 9 | "Councilor Selena's been acting really strange, recently. Always in meetings, never got time for the people. There's whispers that she's involved in some shady business." |
| 10 | "Word around town is something big's about to happen. Some folks think it's just the train's grand opening, but others are bracing for trouble. There's just too many accid |

NAVIGATING LUMINARY HAVEN

While the city is easily walkable due to its paved roadways, Luminary Haven also features a network of aether trams for quick transportation. These small bus-like devices, powered by crystals from the local aetherite mines, travel on city roads and are guided by ley lines, blending technology and magic.

AETHER TRAM

Aether trams are easy to spot with their translucent, shimmering designs. They operate from the major stations across the city: the Main Gates, the Ethereal Spire, the Quill & Scroll, and the Starlight Tavern are the busiest. The fare for a ride is 3 sp paid upon boarding, and the routes circle the town in 1 hour. Tram drivers are quick to grumble about the new aether train that will take away some of their customers once it's up and running.

COUNCILOR SELENA LYRAS





FIZZ SPARKLEFIZZ AT THE STARLIGHT

LOCATIONS

The following locations are just a few of the sites within the town. For more detailed descriptions of Luminary Haven, refer to the *Etheria: Rage of the Aetherstorm* campaign setting sourcebook.

QUILL & SCROLL

Book-laden shelves stretch high into the vaulted ceiling, casting long shadows on the mosaic-tiled floor below. In the heart of this expansive library, a labyrinth of floating bookcases drift lazily amidst the steady air, their magical enchantments allowing them to shift and move at a whisper's command. Behind a large oak desk in the library's epicenter, a grey-feathered figure holding an old tome notices your arrival before returning to his reading.

The Quill & Scroll is the city's primary repository of knowledge, filled to the brim with dusty scrolls, ancient books, and magical artifacts. Kaelis Inkfeather (lawful-neutral, owlfolk **aethermage**), the chief librarian, is known for his encyclopedic memory and strict reverence for the knowledge preserved in his domain. His

dark grey feathers, as are his simple, plain robes, are meticulously cared for—just ignore the ink stains that won't come out. Though initially reserved, he values those who share his respect for books. Offering to help him with a task could be an excellent way to gain his favor and access to the wealth of information he guards.

A HELPING HAND

As the party delves deeper into the library, they hear a soft, frustrated sigh. Kaelis stands beneath a floating bookshelf that has drifted too high, beyond his reach. Upon it is a book he seems to need—an ancient, leather-bound tome with ornate golden symbols. "I swear, the enchantments on these bookshelves have a mind of their own," he mutters, looking at the book longingly.

The characters have a chance to help Kaelis:

- **Reach for the Book:** The book is within reach for anyone willing to climb up the stationary bookcases adjacent to the floating one. A successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check allows a character to retrieve the book safely.
- **Disrupt the Magic:** A character with a knack for understanding aetherium flow could try to temporarily disrupt the enchantment on the floating shelf, bringing it back down. A successful DC 15 Intelli-

gence (Arcana) check reveals the flow of aetherium and how to disrupt it.

- **Appease the Shelf:** A character with a way with objects (through a *mending* cantrip or some magical persuasion) could coax the shelf lower. This could be done through a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, treating the bookshelf as if it were a creature.

If the party retrieves the book, Kaelis shows gratitude by sharing vital information from the Haven Rumors table. If the characters also mention Selena's name or show him Selena's crest, he is more willing to share additional knowledge, providing them with a broader understanding of the happenings around Luminary Haven.



KAE LIS INKFEATHER

CRIMSON COG INFORMATION

While investigating at the Quill & Scroll, characters may delve into the archives to uncover relevant information about the Crimson Cogs. The information in the “About the Crimson Cogs” section is readily available. For every hour of focused research, the characters may attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Each success yields one of the following pieces of information, shared in the order listed:

- **Crimson Cog Modus Operandi.** An old ledger of criminal activities across Etheria details the destructive strategies of the Crimson Cogs: deliberate destabilization of society, high-profile assassinations, and destruction of civil properties. Such tactics imply that the cult tends to target people and places with a significant societal impact.
- **Korvis Threefingers.** Buried in a recent treatise on notable criminals is a brief mention of a half-elven Crimson Cog operative named Korvis Threefingers who earned his name after setting off an explosion that killed a gathering of aethermages. The entry mentions he has a prominent scar across his face and is missing two fingers from his right hand. The identities of the Crimson Cog cultists have tightly held secrets, and knowing this may help the characters in their investigation.
- **Aethercore's Power.** A research paper on arcane technology mentions an aethercore as an engine for harnessing and controlling aetherite. The report continues with warnings that the aethercore must be held in stasis or its power can overload and cause a deadly explosion.

STARLIGHT TAVERN

The doors to the Starlight Tavern creak open, bathing you in the warm glow from within. The smell of well-spiced ale and sizzling food wafts toward you, inviting and comforting. The tavern buzzes with the sound of quiet conversations, the occasional outburst of laughter, and the rising and falling tide of intriguing tales. Behind the bar, a quick-handed goblin works diligently, his keen ears catching snippets of chatter as he fills mugs with frothy brews. A frown is etched on his already heavily-wrinkled face as he watches an argument growing between a pair of belligerent dwarves.

The Starlight Tavern is a hub of social activity, filled with patrons from all walks of life. Amid the warm chatter and clinking glasses, the characters find Fizz Sparklefizz, the goblin bartender, serving drinks and listening to tales.

BELLIGERENT BROTHERS

Two dwarven brothers, Balgor and Tholgrin, are standing nose-to-nose, their faces reddening and voices escalating. They're identical twins, each sporting thick white beards, sun-burnished skin, and robust bellies—a testament to their shared love of hearty meals and robust ales. They're easy to differentiate only by their contrasting attires: Balgor, dressed in a well-tailored tunic, and Tholgrin, donned in a rugged miner's garb.

Balgor, the more refined of the two, blames Tholgrin for losing a treasured family amulet in a bet, while Tholgrin insists that the amulet was his to lose. Their argument threatens to erupt into a full-blown brawl, risking the tavern's peace and Fizz's continued goodwill.

The characters have several options to defuse the situation:

- **Mediation.** A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check can calm the brothers and convince them to talk through their differences. The party's mediator could suggest alternatives such as shared custody of the amulet once they win it back or replacing it with something of equal or greater value.
- **Distraction.** An exciting story or diversion could draw the brothers' attention away from their argument. This distraction could be a tall tale (DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check), an intriguing riddle (DC 15 Intelligence (History) check), or a sudden "emergency" requiring their attention.
- **Appeal to their bonds.** If a character learns through a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check that the brothers both value family over their individual grievances, they can use this knowledge to remind the brothers of their familial bond.

If the party successfully quells the dispute, Fizz offers his thanks, saying his normal bouncer is currently running errands. If asked about the Crimson Cogs or any local rumors, he shares two rumors he heard from the Haven Rumors table. Alternatively, a 10 ap donation to the "Starberry Fund" also loosens his tongue, whether the dispute was resolved or not. Lastly, he mentions his concern about his dwindling supply of starberries and tells the party he will pay a handsome reward if they can get some for him.

VAPOR AND VIAL

The scent of exotic herbs and a faint magical tang fills the air in this alchemical shop. Brightly colored potions bubble in glass vials across the walls, reflecting prismatic light onto the wooden shelves and tabletops. Dried herbs, roots, and other ingredients hang from the ceiling, rustling softly as a gentle breeze sweeps through the open windows. At the center of the store, a large, polished wooden counter hosts a collection of trinkets and talismans.

This alchemy shop is nestled amidst the leafy foliage of a treehouse. The shop is run by Leyna, a cheerful half-giant with a knack for concocting potent brews and a keen ear for rumors.

LEYNA THE ALCHEMIST

Stationed behind the counter is Leyna, a half-giant alchemist in her prime years. Her blond hair is neatly tied into a bun, framing her sharp, observant eyes that flicker with friendly warmth. Leyna's green robes bear the stains of countless potions, and her demeanor speaks of a professional who loves her craft. Leyna is known for her ability to brew exceptional potions and her propensity to overhear local chatter. Her dual roles as an alchemist and an unofficial gatherer of information make her a valuable resource for the party.

While Leyna appreciates simple courtesy, she values action even more. She is fond of a rare herb called moonlace that helps with general aches and pains but has recently been hard to come by. She'll open up with rumors if the characters bring her some or take a little time to help rearrange her overcrowded storage room (a simple DC 10 Strength check or 1 hour's work). Buying an expensive potion (costing 25 ap or more) or successfully passing a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check can also win Leyna's trust.

Once the characters have gained Leyna's trust, she's willing to share some whispers she's heard around town. Roll twice on the Haven Rumors table, re-rolling on duplicates or choosing two rumors the party has yet to learn.

OTHER LOCATIONS

The party may wish to explore other intriguing places in Luminary Haven. For every hour the party spends in each location gathering information, roll once on the Haven Rumors table, re-rolling on duplicates. A few locations they may choose to explore are as follows:

ARCANE ACADEMY

The Academy houses a comprehensive collection of arcane knowledge. Characters researching here who succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence (History) check can uncover ancient texts hinting at powerful artifacts resembling Balthazar's aethercore. They are described as haz-

ardous energy sources with devastating explosive capabilities that the ancient Astromagi abandoned as too unstable to use.

CRYSTAL CANOPY MARKET

This vibrant marketplace is a rich source of both goods and gossip. As characters mingle with the crowd, they may overhear a hushed conversation about unusual activity around the Aether Tram Station, a place that's been curiously popular among newcomers with a hardened, vigilant look. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check can net this vital hint.

ETHEREAL SPIRE

The Ethereal Spire is not just an observatory; it's a symbol of the city's dedication to celestial knowledge. Those with keen perception may notice that the shadows cast by the Spire's star-shaped ornaments align perfectly with specific points in the city at certain times of the day. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a hidden pattern: the shadows point toward key locations of potential Crimson Cogs activity.

THE PRISMATIC PINT

This tavern might be less busy than the Starlight Tavern, but it still has valuable information. Characters can spend an hour eavesdropping on conversations and overhear about a regular patron, a three-fingered half-elf often seen with a mysteriously cloaked figure in private talks. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check overhears someone saying that the half-elf is never seen during the day and always comes from the direction of the new train station.

AETHER TRAIN STATION

This intricate blend of metal and organically shaped crystal is a beacon of innovative architecture, its outer shell glowing with the luminescence of contained aether energy. It vibrates with potential, humming softly like a living creature awaiting its first breath. The unopened Aether Train Station, a recent addition to Luminary Haven, serves as a secret hideout for Korvis Threefingers, a notorious Crimson Cog operative.

ABOUT THE TRAIN

The Aether Train is an awe-inspiring innovation that merges robust metals with luminous crystalline elements, powered by an aetherite engine that transmutes raw aetherium into kinetic energy. This radiant vehicle pulsates with life, its body glowing with expertly contained arcane forces. Inside, the train is a cocoon of luxury, offering amenities like temperature control and plush seating, all bathed under the colorful lights emanating from crystal fixtures.

The anticipation around the Aether Train peaks as its maiden voyage is scheduled for the following evening. Adding to the grandeur, the inaugural journey will carry the esteemed Conclave of Stars, a testament to the high

expectations set for this revolutionary mode of transportation. The train, under the surveillance of its intricate aetherium-infused security systems and a dedicated mechanical crew, stands ready to carve out a new chapter in the history of Luminary Haven. With this blend of innovation and celebration, the Aether Train's debut promises to be a significant milestone in the city's progression.

ENTRANCE

Once the party arrives at the station entrance, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

The train station perfectly balances organic aesthetics with industrial. Massive arches of polished steel intertwine with living vines, creating a sparkling skeletal structure that forms the station's grand entrance. Mechanical guards stand at attention at the gate, their optics scanning everyone approaching.

The station is not open to the public, and the pair of humanoid mechanical security drones at the entrance stop the party unless they display Councilor Selena's badge. A brightly lit set of winding stairs leads down into the concourse,

CONCOURSE

The concourse is a 50-square-foot space with a domed ceiling covered in bright murals depicting a forest canopy. Vendors' stalls stand ready to be filled with all manner of convenience items, from food and beverages to branded merchandise. An automated ticket booth stands idle, its arcane machinery humming quietly in anticipation of future passengers.

KORVIS THREEFINGERS

A lone figure diligently tinkers on an exposed panel of a train car. Dressed in oil-stained overalls, the individual has a gnarled scar running down his cheek. Noticeably missing two fingers, his right hand still deftly manipulates a set of arcane tools. As you approach, the engineer looks up and flashes a quick, friendly smile, "Ah, visitors! We're not quite open yet, so there's really not much to see here. Name's Korv, by the way. How'd you get down here, anyway?" His eyes flicker with a hint of unease as he gauges your intentions.

Korvis Threefingers (neutral-evil, half-elf **grenadier**, see Appendix) masquerades as an ordinary engineer, "Korv," despite his distinct scar and missing fingers. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check or prior knowledge about him unmasks him as a fake engineer.

Korvis maintains his cover unless directly challenged with hard evidence about his association with the Crimson Cogs or attacked. Once accused, he signals the two

security drones (**animated armor**) from the entrance to come and protect him by yelling, “Activate Protocol 88,” to turn them into rampaging killing machines who obey only Korvis. The saboteur is a fanatic loyalist who fights to the death.

CONTROL ROOM

The control room is the only area accessible from the concourse that is unlocked and not empty. It serves as the beating heart of the Aether Train Station, its pulsing rhythms manifesting in the flicker of lights and the hum of machinery.

The room is filled with an intricate array of panels, switches, and dials, all sparkling with ethereal energy. Dominating the space are large glass windows offering an unsettling view of the silent, dormant platforms, their tracks disappearing into shadowy, promise-filled tunnels, waiting to ferry the city's citizens through an unseen aetherial network.

A seemingly ordinary pile of engineering equipment and supplies sits in the corner of this room. On closer inspection, it reveals itself as the subtle living quarters of Korvis Threefingers. Discarded items—a weathered wrench, a half-empty wineskin, a spare set of engineer's clothes—serve as breadcrumbs hinting he has been here

for about a week. The character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score notices an *aetherite light cube* (see the Appendix, it has 6 hours of energy remaining) sitting amongst the belongings.

Hidden Compartment. Amid the room's dazzling technology, a peculiar glint off a crystalline pillar invites closer inspection. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check exposes the cleverly disguised removable panel and the secrets it guards. Inside is a stash of encrypted documents. These papers teem with a blend of arcane and mechanical symbols in a complex language.

Deciphering the coded documents requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Alternatively, if presented to Councilor Selena, her expertise can translate the cryptic script. One name consistently marked throughout these instructions, 'Chief V,' hints at a connection to Varek Embereye, the chief engineer. His involvement in this nefarious plot becomes the next puzzle piece in the characters' unfolding investigation. If the codes are not found, the fact that a cultist was masquerading as an engineer is enough to cause Councilor Selena to investigate the chief engineer's workshop (see Part 2), just down the hall from her own.

AETHER TRAIN STATION



PART 2

RACE AGAINST TIME

The party's investigation leads them to the torn-asunder workshop of Varek Embereye and a host of clues pointing to the aetherite crystal mines. The clock is ticking as the aether train is set to begin its maiden voyage with the Conclave of Stars aboard.

VERAK'S WORKSHOP

Varek Embereye's workshop in the Ethereal Spire appears chaotic at first glance. Tools and machinery parts are haphazardly strewn about, and a charred corner suggests recent magical activity. The acrid smell of burnt aether permeates the room, hinting at the use of powerful magic. The party eventually learns that Varek, suspected to be a kidnapping victim, is a cultist of the Crimson Cogs.

Once the party arrives at the workshop, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

Stepping into the chief engineer's workshop, you are immediately struck by a scene of chaos. Machinery is strewn about, cogs and gears litter the floor, and blueprints are scattered amongst the wreckage. The air carries the acrid tang of burnt aether and the residual hum of arcane energy. Amid the disorder, a well-worn work table sits in the center of the room, bearing the marks of countless hours of crafting and inventing.

INVESTIGATION

Characters who search the chamber discover signs of a struggle, such as scattered tools and scratches on the wooden floor. Additionally, amidst the wreckage is a slightly scratched *aetheric compass* (see Appendix), often used by miners and engineers in high aetherite areas. Meanwhile, a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the remnants of a potent teleportation spell in a scorched corner of the room. This finding insinuates that Varek might have left involuntarily and by force. In fact, the cultist was "rescued" by other members of the Crimson Cog soon after the characters dispatched Korvis.

CLUES

Among Varek's scattered notes and designs is a blueprint of the nearby aetherite mines. Varek's handwritten notes draw attention to a critical area where the planned tunnels for the aether train coincide with an existing mining cavern. Characters with a background in mining

instantly recognize the weakness that an explosion can exploit in the marked location.

COUNCILOR LYRAS' INSIGHT

When shown the *aetheric compass*, Councilor Lyras points out that such devices are given exclusively to chief miners and shouldn't have been in Varek's workshop. Additionally, Selena mentions recent increases in reports of disturbances in the mines. However, its location and the high buildup of aetherium make it a constant target for creatures from the Expanse.

After seeing Varek's blueprint, the Councilor expresses concern over the marked intersection between the aether train tunnels and the mine shafts. She emphasizes the impending maiden voyage of the aether train as a diplomatic trust between Rustique and Luminary Haven and asks the party to extend their investigation into the mines.

EMERALD CANOPY ENCOUNTERS

d8 Information

- 1 **Aether-Touched Dire Wolf.** A dire wolf with a glowing aura of aether energy confronts the party. It has resistance to non-magical attacks and can use a bonus action on its turn to regain 1d8 hit points once per day.
- 2 **Injured Miner.** A severely injured miner stumbles out of the undergrowth, babbling about unseen danger in the mines. He pleads for aid and can provide insight into the mines' layout, although he knows little about the attackers or the current condition.
- 3 **Glowing Fungus Patch.** A cluster of 1d4 +1 bioluminescent fungi. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals the fungus can be eaten and produce the same effects as a *potion of acid resistance*.
- 4 **Crystal Shards.** Sharp shards of aetherite crystal, remnants of an old aether storm, are strewn across the path. They will cause 1d4 piercing damage unless detected with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.
- 5 **Aether Infused Spider.** A giant spider and a phase spider have spun a nearly invisible web across the path, hoping to trap unsuspecting prey.
- 6 **Lost Pilgrim.** A solitary explorer has lost her way and can provide the party with useful information about the canopy if persuaded or assisted.
- 7 **Aether Storm.** A sudden storm of swirling aether energy descends upon the party. All creatures must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d6 force damage.
- 8 **Aetherite Golem.** A wandering golem made from condensed aetherite crystal blocks the path. The golem uses earth elemental statistics, is a Construct, and is non-hostile unless provoked.

THE EMERALD CANOPY

Navigating the winding road through the Emerald Canopy from Luminary Haven to the Aetherite Mine is not a journey for the faint of heart. The verdant forest pulsates with the energy of infused aetherite, fostering unique and sometimes dangerous life forms. The jungle is constantly retaking the path and sometimes vanishes altogether.

Travel Pace & Encounters. Moving at a normal pace, the party can cover about 3 miles per hour through the dense forest (see the “Traveling the Expanse” section of the *Etheria: Rage of the Aetherstorm* sourcebook for more information). A journey from Luminary Haven to the mine, covering approximately 12 miles, takes 4 hours. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check is required every hour of travel to maintain their course and time. A failure results in a random encounter as determined by the Emerald Canopy Encounters table.

THE AETHER-TORN JUNGLE

As the characters explore the lush jungle of the Emerald Canopy, you should bear in mind the unique elements of this jungle and create an immersive experience. Here are some ways to bring the wild Canopy to life:

- **Vibrant Flora:** Describe towering trees draped in jade-green leaves. The air is fragrant with exotic flowers such as the Azure Lily and Silver Thorned Vine, sought after by alchemists for potent concoctions.
- **Teeming Fauna:** Creatures fill the air with symphonic calls. The characters may witness an Emerald Macaw's radiant plumage as it soars above, or spot a stealthy Canopy Lynx prowling amongst the undergrowth.
- **Fickle Weather:** Sudden downpours create visibility challenges. Characters require DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) checks to navigate during heavy rains, while occasional sunlight reveals the jungle's glistening beauty.
- **Magical Anomalies:** Aether-infused energies cause bewildering phenomena. Characters encounter fleeting illusions or time-warping glades. Employ Intelligence (Arcana) checks to fathom these anomalies.
- **Astromagi Ruins:** Crumbling shrines of the ancient Astromagi Dominion lie enveloped by the jungle. Characters may decipher cryptic inscriptions or negotiate with guardian spirits protecting hidden treasures.

Remember to keep the descriptions varied and the challenges diverse, so that the Canopy feels like a living, breathing ecosystem with a history and a culture of its own. This helps to create a memorable and exciting journey through the jungle.

AETHERITE MINE ENTRANCE

After enduring the arduous journey through the Canopy, the party arrives at the mine entrance. This threshold into the unknown gapes ominously in the side of a towering cliff face, the normally vibrant aetherite crystals that adorn its entrance eerily dull and lifeless. The Crimson Cogs took control of the mine earlier in the day and set up the aethercore bomb while holding miners hostage.

Read aloud or paraphrase the following once the characters arrive at the mine:

Dull, broken crystal fragments lay shattered across the mine's entrance. Evidence of a struggle is clear: scattered shards of crystal, splintered wood, damaged vegetation, and the ashes of scorch marks. Two once imposing security turrets stand damaged and silent on either side of the mouth of the mine, their metallic bodies twisted and blackened. An eerie silence hangs over the site, broken only by the sad whistle of the wind flowing through the remains of the defeated turrets.

AETHERITE MINE

The Aetherite Mine, the lifeblood of Luminary Haven, was discovered a century ago, revealing significant aetherite deposits that have since become integral to the city's magitech industry. The combined expertise of miners, engineers, and mages ensures efficient extraction, each contributing a vital role.

Miners, equipped with sturdy picks and protective equipment, work side by side with the sentient mechanical aetherforged workers that can excavate raw aetherite with their integrated tools. Engineers, including notable figures like Kevlan Cinderspark, oversee the mine's machinery's structural integrity and smooth operation. Meanwhile, resident mages, under the guidance of Archmage Eldrin Quill, manage the arcane energy flow to prevent unstable reactions.

Specific areas are allocated within the mine for different tasks. The Heartvein is the primary extraction site, and the Crystal Forge handles refining while the Luminary Vault stores processed aetherite. The Recovery Nook provides a haven for injured or fatigued workers to recuperate. The mine works like a well-oiled machine, normally protected by aetheric-powered cannons and sentries.

Despite its functionality, the mine also bears an otherworldly beauty, with glowing aetherite veins providing soft illumination. The recent assault by the Crimson Cogs has left it ominously quiet, with abandoned tools, scattered aetherite shards, and an unsettling buzz of loose aetheric energy serving as grim reminders of the incident. The shattered defense turrets and the missing miners, including a number of the Aetherforged, are just the tip of the iceberg of the cultists' true intentions.

GENERAL FEATURES

These general features are prominent throughout the mine unless otherwise noted in the area descriptions.

Ceilings, Floors, and Walls. The mine is a testament to Luminary Haven's advanced engineering. Smooth, almost organic stone walls curve into rough, vaulted ceilings, reaching heights of 15 feet in most areas. Floors are a patchwork of chiseled rock and metal grating, providing a stable grip along the terrain.

Doors. Doors within the mine are thick steel (AC 18, 50 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage), made to withstand the pressures of tunneling. Locked doors are magically sealed with arcane locks (DC 25) that are powered in the Control Room (area 3).

Lights. Luminescent globes are embedded into the walls and ceilings, casting a dim, orange light throughout the mine's passages, as shown on the provided map. Areas without these crystals are shrouded in darkness unless otherwise noted.

Climate. The mine's climate is regulated by an intricate system of ducts, ensuring a steady temperature of around 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

Aetheric Resonance. The concentration of aetherite in the mine's walls causes a constant low-frequency hum, almost imperceptible but just present enough to become disorienting over time. After each hour a creature spends in the mine must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or suffer from the effects of the confusion spell for one minute. An affected creature can spend an action to attempt the saving throw again at the start of its turn, ending the effect on a success and becoming immune to the resonance for 24 hours.

Magitech Controls. The Aetherite Mine is at the cutting edge of modern magitech, and the doors, metal grating, and lighting are all controlled by a centralized system. Vanek Embereye has taken over the Control Room (area 3) and locked down the mine while the Crimson Cogs set up the Aethercore bomb in area 9.

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the keyed locations on the provided map of the mine.

1. ENTRY HALL

This octagonal hall serves as the gateway to the mine, housing the remnants of once-functional defense turrets. A stairway to the south leads to the outside, while two staircases on the opposite side ascend to the Mine Halls.

In the center of this expansive octagonal chamber. Scorched metal fragments lay scattered across the grated floor and smoky residue lingers in the air. Machines along the eastern and western walls sizzle and smoke while crystal lights flicker erratically. The silence is sporadically broken by the faint echo of dripping water. A pair of northern staircases ascend into the vast, shadowy expanse of the mine.

Malfunctioning Turret. The defense turrets and machinery were deactivated by Vanek Embereye just before the Crimson Cog attack. A creature touching the turret must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to avoid a spark of arcane energy, taking 3 (1d6) force damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

A close inspection and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check reveals the weaponry hasn't been fired in years, indicating they were sabotaged before being destroyed.

Treasure. A character proficient with tinker's tools or thieves' tools can dismantle the turrets with 10 minutes of work and a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. A success yields functional components worth 50 ap in total. In the hands of an engineer, these parts could be repurposed for crafting magitech items.

2. MINE HALLS

These corridors once bustled with workers and aetherforged as they passed between the mining shafts with extracted aetherite. They connect the lifts that ferried miners to each of the three main mine shafts. Characters searching the area who succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check find streaks of fresh and dried blood on the gratings, but there aren't any other signs of remains.

Carts & Grating. Mining carts filled with unstable aetherite crystals block access to the northern and eastern halls. Each cart can be moved with a successful DC 18 Strength check or climbed over with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a failure, one of the cart's 1d4 + 1 aetherite crystals explodes in a flash of aether, and the creature takes 3 (1d6) force damage. These raw crystals are worth 100 ap or can be processed into 1d3 + 1 small aetherite crystals.



Aetherite Mine

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

Mechanical Soldiers. Three niches in the eastern hall hold what appear to be simple metal statues of armored warriors. However, these are dormant magitech automatons awaiting activation. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check reveals their true nature. Once the power to the mine is restored from the Control Room (area 3), these automatons activate, shedding their statue-like exterior to reveal their combat-ready forms. They are programmed to defend the mine against any non-worker presence, and consider the party intruders. If the power is restored, the three **mechanical soldiers** (see Appendix) attack until destroyed.

Balcony Access. The exterior 15-foot high balcony outside the Control Room (area 3) provides an alternate access route. The pair of iron doors on the balcony are unlocked. A successful DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check allows for a quiet entrance, granting the possibility of a surprise attack on the cultists inside. A failure results in the cultists being warned and preparing to ambush the party.

3. CONTROL ROOM

This room is the heart of the mining operation. It is a hub of arcane machinery and controls, currently occupied by Crimson Cog cultists holding miners hostage. This room's northern and southern doors are locked (see General Features).

Two **cultists** led by a **crimson engineer** (the engineer is wearing a *steadyhand gauntlet*, see Appendix for both stat blocks and magic item information) named Hestor have holed up in this room and taken three miners hostage. They are cornered and defend their position fiercely, fighting to the death. While

they hold no true ill-will towards the miners (since they are not aetherborn), they don't hesitate to threaten their lives to get the characters to back down. Hestor was once an engineer that helped in the mines and was turned to the Crimson Cogs' cause by Vanek Embereye. The miners recognize the engineer and are surprised at the betrayal.

Restoring Power. Once freed, any miner can assist the party in activating the power controls. Otherwise, a character who spends at least 10 minutes testing the controls can figure out the panels and succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Restoring the power unlocks the doors to the elevator shafts (areas 4, 5, and 6), as well as activates the powered grates and mechanical soldiers in area 2.

Treasure. On one wall hangs a map of the upper level of the mine (areas 1-6) and the old cavern (areas 7-9). The cultists carry 20 ap in assorted coinage amongst their pouches, a *potion of healing*, and the engineer's *steadyhand gauntlet*.

4. DESTROYED LIFTS

The doors to these rooms are locked (see General Features), and restoring power in the Control Room (area 3) disengages the spells.

Once vital to the mine's operations, these lift systems were reduced to rubble and debris after malicious sabotage by the Crimson Cogs. They purposefully trapped the miners below to eliminate potential interference in their plans.

Hazards: Unstable Lift & Controls.

Attempting to manipulate or use the broken platforms can prove hazardous. A creature stepping onto the lift must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage and become restrained from the fall into shifting debris. Furthermore,

the fractured lift controls retain vestiges of their aetherite power source. A creature that touches the controls triggers an electrical discharge and must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) lightning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.



MECHANICAL SOLDIER

5. PROTECTED LIFT

The cultists weren't able to detonate the explosion to destroy this lift after a dwarven miner named Devlin Stonebrow managed to fend them off. He was severely injured and became sealed off in the room to die once the locks were initiated from the Control Room (area 3). He now lies above the explosive rune in a protective manner. Devlin is a veteran **aether miner** (see Appendix) with a grizzled beard and soot-covered clothing. He has a noticeable limp due to an old mining injury that replaced one leg with a mechanical prosthetic. Devlin's a tough and stoic grump with a soft spot for his fellow miners.

A dwarven miner lies slumped on the floor of an elevator lift, a painful grimace frozen on his unconscious face.

Trap: Glyph of Warding. Underneath the unconscious miner is a *glyph of warding* that can be noticed with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check. Any attempts to move or heal Delvin or operate the lift activate the glyph. Triggering the glyph causes an explosion in a 20-foot radius, and each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) thunder damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The explosion destroys the lift and collapses the tunnel below. The trap can be disarmed with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check or deactivated with a *dispel magic* spell.

Rescuing Delvin. Delvin is unconscious and at 0 hit points. Stabilizing him requires a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check or a healing spell. Delvin can provide valuable insight into the mine's layout and points the characters toward area 7 to find the cultists while he begins sending the lift to bring miners from below to escape. He can be convinced to join the party as a temporary companion with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check. He is fearless and willing to die in combat to protect his fellow miners.

Treasure. Delvin's coin pouch contains 15 ap, the totality of his saved wages. If rescued, he insists the characters take it as thanks.

6. OLD LIFT

This room houses an ancient lift, a relic from the mine's early days. Although worn by time, this lift served as the Crimson Cogs' access point to the caverns below. The walls of this room are studded with ancient gears, visibly corroded but still sporadically moving. These ancient gears, relics of the mine's initial operations, are infused with lingering aetherite energies. Periodically, they click and whirl into action, causing faint spectral apparitions of miners to flicker momentarily, engaged in their endless task. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (History) check identifies them as echoes of the original miners from centuries ago when the Sundering occurred. These phantoms can't be interacted with but



provide an insight into the room's past and may even offer subtle hints about the repairs needed on the control panel. Watching them for at least 10 minutes and succeeding on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check grants a +1 bonus to checks made to repair the panel.

ACTIVATING THE LIFT

The lift's control panel is inactive due to missing components Venek took to block pursuit. Should the characters investigate the control panel, several discoveries and tasks lay ahead. If the party rescues Devlin (see area 5), the crafty dwarf can give detailed instructions on fixing the lift, and the characters have advantage on all checks to repair the panel.

Getting the Parts. A casual search of the panel determines necessary components are missing and could likely be found amongst the wreckage of the destroyed lifts (areas 4 or 5). A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check allows a character to salvage the needed components from any other destroyed lift control panel.

Fixing the Panel. With the components in hand, a successful DC 14 Intelligence check using tinkerer's tools repairs the control panel. Characters not proficient with tinker's tools can still attempt the check with disadvantage.

Aetherite Power Source. Once the control panel is repaired, it needs to be powered. This can be achieved by providing a raw aetherite crystal (available in the carts in area 2), which will be consumed in the process, or sacrificing a spell slot of any level to power the lift manually.

DESCENDING THE SHAFT

The lift can be dismantled with a successful DC 16 Strength check or 30 minutes of labor. The lift shaft itself is an 80-foot-deep smooth cylinder of rock. Descending it requires a DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check if characters have climbing gear. Without it, the difficulty of the check increases to DC 16 due to the shaft's slippery and smooth surface.

Alternately, characters could use spells or abilities that allow them to descend safely, such as a *feather fall* or *levitate* spell. Ropes and pulleys from the lift mechanism could also be repurposed with a successful DC 14 Intelligence check to create a makeshift descent mechanism. A character proficient with tinkerer's tools can add their proficiency bonus to their roll.

7. ABANDONED MINE

This cavern was the original iron mine that dried out centuries ago and has lain abandoned until Venek and the Crimson Cogs started to enact their plans.

Read aloud or paraphrase the following once the party enters this area:

Eroded by time, the vast cavernous expanse bears the scarred and rough-hewn surfaces of hard labor and the occasional faded mural. Old, rusted mine cart tracks snake into the gloom, their rusted presence hinting at a once-thriving operation. The air carries a strange acrid tang, and an eerie quiet fills the space, disturbed only by the faint echoing of water from further ahead.

The cavern walls, worn by time, bear fading murals illustrating dwarves and humans toiling alongside towering figures of iron and flame. A DC 14 Intelligence (History) check can determine that these towering, fiery figures are the antecedents of today's aetherforged. The past echoes in the rusted, ancient mine cart tracks crisscrossing the cavern. Once the veins of this operation, they are now a silent testament to the rigorous work that unfolded here. Forgotten tools, rusted oil lanterns, and a decaying wooden sign reading "Iron Delve #145" in faded Dwarvish script litter the ground, their presence a poignant reminder of the mine's vibrant past.

8. TAINTED RIVER

The Tainted River, approximately 10 to 15 feet wide with a strong current, bisects the cavern, forming a natural divide. A cliff on the northern edge dips towards the river, forming an impassable barrier to the other sections of the mine. A hidden cave sits beneath the rocky portion that divides the river into north and south sections.

Hazard: Toxic Waters. A creature entering or starting its turn in the tainted river must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (2d4) acid damage and being poisoned for 1 hour on a failed save, or half as much damage and not being poisoned on a successful one.

Treasure. A small alcove lies beneath the rock wall that splits the river. A remarkably preserved dwarven mining pick lies in this nook, wedged between the rocks and cloaked in ancient sediment. The pickaxe is carved with ancient sigils inlaid with gold and is worth 500 ap to a collector.



AETHERCORE BOMB

9. BOMB SITE

The site of the imminent aethercore bomb catastrophe, overseen by Vanek Embereye, a skilled engineer and loyal member of the Crimson Cogs. Accompanying him is his watchful guardian, a radiant basilisk—an ordinary beast twisted and enhanced by aetherite exposure.

When the party enters the cavern, read aloud:

In the heart of this cavern rests a pulsating monstrosity, a device thrumming with barely-contained energy, its myriad wires tunneling into the stony earth. An imposing figure stands next to the device, his focus unyielding as he manipulates gears and valves with deft precision. His spectral cloak ripples around armor imbued with an eerie luminescence, a stark crimson cog displayed across his chest and glowing against the light. A massive eight-legged reptile lounges next to a large cart and radiates a similar shimmer, its scales gleaming like polished gems. The sudden shift of its head causes the figure to turn, a sneer twisting his features. "I suppose you're here to save the day," he scoffs, echoed by the basilisk's threatening hiss.

Traps: Shock and Thaw. Two types of traps lie in wait on the sloping path leading to the site, marked by a red and yellow X on the map. The red X is an aetheric shock grid powered by an almost invisible silver strand that a character can notice with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. A creature stepping onto the trapped area must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn. The yellow X is a net launcher tucked into the rock wall and triggered by a makeshift stone and rope pressure plate that a character can notice with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. A creature stepping onto the trapped area must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained, requiring (escape DC 14).

THE CHIEF ENGINEER

The first thing one notices about Vanek Embereye (lawful neutral, human **crimson engineer**, see Appendix) is the cold bitterness in his eyes—a reflection of the tragedy he's endured. Intelligent and articulate, he remains defiant in his cause, distrusting any strangers who cross his path.

Vanek was the chief engineer on Luminary Haven's aether train project, passionately believing in the transformative potential of aetherite. But Vanek's world col-

lapsed when a reckless, wild aetherborn mage—driven to instability by the irresponsible use of drawing in too much ambient aetherium—caused an accident that claimed the life of his young son. The corruption and greed of Luminary Haven's officials, who valued profits over safety, turned that grief into a burning desire for vengeance.

Non-Combat Alternative. Despite Vanek's embittered demeanor, he isn't a villain at heart—merely a man driven to extremes by loss and betrayal. The party can attempt to assure him that they will bring Luminary Haven's corruption to light and promote the responsible usage of aetherite. A character can use an action to make a DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check with a good argument as to why the party can be trusted. The party needs 2 successful checks before 3 failures to get the engineer to stop fighting. On a success, Vanek aids them in defusing the bomb and stands as a witness against the corrupt officials, and shares the following important information:

- **Aethercore Bomb Deactivation.** As the bomb's engineer, Vanek has intimate knowledge of its deactivation procedure, which involves a series of steps that were put in as a failsafe against his own actions. He warns that any missteps could trigger an immediate explosion, but with careful guidance and a skilled Arcana practitioner, the bomb could be safely disarmed.
- **The Crimson Cogs' Objective.** Vanek discloses that the Crimson Cogs approached him through a contact named Garnet Gearloose, and they are driven by a mission to prevent another Sundering. They view aetherborn mages and their reckless harnessing of aetherite as the catalysts for such a calamity. The deliberate destruction of Luminary Haven's aether train was a step towards disempowering these mages and restricting aetherite accessibility.
- **Corruption in Luminary Haven.** Vanek voices his disdain for Luminary Haven's power structure, focusing mainly on Archmagus Seraphina, who he accuses of hoarding aetherite for personal enrichment. He blames her disregard for safety regulations and the unchecked power of aetherborn mages for the tragic death of his son. This loss catalyzed his alignment with the Crimson Cogs, seeing their cause as a means to expose Luminary Haven's corruption and avenge his son.

Combat. If diplomacy fails, Vanek stands ready to fight for his cause. He firmly believes that only drastic action can reveal Luminary Haven's corruption. He battles alongside his aether-infused basilisk, using his engineering knowledge to manipulate the battleground to his advantage.

DISARMING THE AETHERCORE

The aethercore bomb is a complex device built with advanced magitech. Disarming the bomb is a delicate process, which, if mishandled, could lead to a catastrophic explosion. The procedure requires a series of checks to navigate the tangle of magical glyphs and mechanical components successfully. If the party manages to persuade Vanek to help them disarm the bomb, he can provide them with crucial insights and guidance, lowering the DC of each check by 5.

The disarming process consists of three steps, each corresponding to a layer of security and requiring an individual successful check. On a failure of any check by 5 or more, the bomb detonates immediately. Otherwise, the DC of that check increases by 1 for future attempts.

- **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana):** Protective glyphs are woven into the casing of the bomb. Mistakenly triggering a glyph could set off the bomb prematurely. Pressing the correct glyphs in order deactivates the outer security. Characters proficient in Arcana have advantage on this check.
- **DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand):** A physical, mechanical lock must be unlocked once the outer glyphs are bypassed. This lock is complex and inscribed with anti-magic proofing runes. Characters proficient with thieves' tools can add their proficiency bonus to this check.
- **DC 17 Strength (Athletics):** The final step is safely removing the aethercore from the bomb casing. The proper pressure and leverage must be used to crack open the container to remove the powerful core in its center.

CONCLUSION

The aftermath of the conflict in the mines sets into motion a cascade of changes, each event a domino knocked over by the choices made by the party. The fate of Luminary Haven and Iron Heights, the destiny of Vanek, and the status of the aethercore are all intertwined.

If the aethercore bomb is disarmed successfully, Luminary Haven breathes a sigh of relief, saved from impending doom. The aetherite train continues its operations, ensuring the flow of commerce between the cities. Councilor Selena showers the heroes with accolades, making them honorary citizens of Luminary Haven and rewarding them handsomely from the city's treasury (at the GM's discretion). Back in Iron Heights, Balthazar Gearwright gratefully receives the safe aethercore and begins his project to provide power to the less privileged areas.

Should the bomb detonate, the disaster decimates the mine and wreaks havoc in Luminary Haven. The severance of the aetherite supply line triggers panic and distress as magic dwindles within the city. Councilor Selena has to face a city in chaos, her standing shaky amidst the citizens' outrage. Balthazar Gearwright's disappointment is palpable as his plans for the aethercore are shattered.

If Vanek lives and has been persuaded to repent, he devotes his life to ensuring that no more tragedies occur due to the misuse of aetherite. His passion for the cause makes him an unexpected ally for Balthazar, who welcomes his expertise in promoting safe aetherite use. Together, they harness the power of the aethercore into an energy source that uplifts thousands and giving the most impoverished a better life.

Should Vanek die or escape unrepentant, he remains a looming threat. His death could inspire the Crimson Cogs further, while his escape means he could resume his dangerous plans elsewhere, a future problem waiting to resurface for the party.

If Luminary Haven's corruption is revealed, it will drastically change the city's leadership. Trust in authority wanes, leading to mass protests and demands for transparency. Councilor Selena has to navigate the tumultuous political landscape, which might strengthen her position or lead to her downfall.

Should the corruption remain a secret, the city continues as it was, but the undercurrent of deceit remains. The heroes have staved off immediate disaster, but this hidden corruption might germinate future threats. Balthazar Gearwright grows wary, recognizing that his work against the city's dark underbelly is far from over, and he keeps the characters on notice for future happenings.

No matter the outcome, this marks a new chapter for the party. They've influenced the future of two cities, made allies and adversaries, and created ripples in the currents of history. Future adventures beckon with new challenges and opportunities, but for now, they've earned a respite to reflect on the impacts of their deeds.

APPENDIX

This appendix contains information about new magic items and monsters introduced in this adventure.

MAGIC ITEMS

For more information on how magitech items work in Etheria, see “Chapter 5: Magic and Technology” on page 39 in *Etheria: Rage of the Aetherstorm*.

AETHERIC COMPASS

Wondrous item, common (requires attunement)

This brass and glass globe is a compass with a floating aetherite crystal needle at its center. The needle points in the direction of the largest source of aetherium within a half-mile radius. As an action, you can use the compass to determine the direction of the nearest significant source of aetherium energy that equals at least a Large-sized aetherite crystal. The compass does not indicate the distance to the source and provides the direction for 1 hour. This effect can be activated once per day.

AETHERITE LIGHT CUBE

Wondrous item (magitech), common

This 3-inch-diameter metal cube feels light and hollow, yet sturdy and uncrushable. As a bonus action, you can speak the command word to ignite or extinguish a radiating bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional 20 feet. The energy duration of the cube is only drained when the light is activated. You can spend a bonus action to recharge the cube using aetherite crystals.

STEADYHAND GAUNTLET

Wondrous item (magitech), uncommon

Crafted from finely wrought copper and set with an intricate array of aetherite-powered gears, this gauntlet aids in honing the wearer's accuracy. Its delicate machinery calibrates minute corrections to the wearer's hand movements, lending improved steadiness to their aim. The gauntlet holds up to 3 charges that can be renewed using aetherite crystals at a rate of 1 energy hour per charge. While wearing the gauntlet, you can use a bonus action to expend a charge to gain a +1 bonus to a single weapon attack roll made with the weapon you are holding with the gauntlet or a +1 bonus to your next Strength ability check or saving throw for 1 minute.

MONSTERS

The following stat blocks are new monsters presented in this adventure.

AETHER BASILISK

Medium Monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	2 (-4)	8 (-1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +2

Damage Resistances force

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Aether Affinity. The aether basilisk's attacks are magical and deal an additional 3 (1d6) force damage (included in the attack).

Petrifying Gaze. If a creature starts its turn within 30 ft. of the basilisk and the two of them can see each other, the basilisk can force the creature to make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw if the basilisk isn't incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature magically begins to turn to stone and is restrained. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends. On a failure, the creature is petrified until freed by the greater restoration spell or other magic.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) force damage.

Aether Breath (Recharge 5-6). The basilisk exhales aether energy in a 20-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the line must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

AETHERMAGE

Medium Humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 13 (16 with mage armor)

Hit Points 27 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, plus two more languages

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Aether Attunement. The Aethermage can use a bonus action to tap into the aether, gaining advantage on one spell attack roll or causing one target to make a saving throw with disadvantage against a spell it casts. This ability can be used twice, regaining use after a short or long rest.

Spellcasting. The Aethermage is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The Aethermage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, aetheric pulse**

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, lightning bolt*

4th level (1 slot): *aetheric shield**

* denotes spells introduced in the *Crimson Shadows* adventure

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8 - 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

REACTIONS

Aetheric Deflection. The Aethermage can use its reaction to impose disadvantage on one attack roll targeting it, by bending the aether around itself. This ability can be used once, regaining use after a short or long rest.

AETHER MINER

Medium Humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +3, Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft. (due to prolonged exposure to aetherite), passive Perception 12

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Aether Resistance. The Aether Miner has advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects due to prolonged exposure to aetherite.

ACTIONS

Pickaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Throw Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

BONUS ACTION

Aether Infusion (1/Short Rest). The Aether Miner draws on the latent aetherium and gains 5 temporary hit points and its movement speed increases by 10 feet for 1 minute.

GRENADIER

Medium Humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +2, Acrobatics +4

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Blast Shield. The Grenadier uses a specially designed blast shield for protection. When the Grenadier is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage from explosions, the Grenadier takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only quarter damage if it fails.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Grenadier makes two attacks, either with its Light Crossbow, Short Sword, or one of each.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Grenade (3/Day). The Grenadier throws a grenade at a point up to 60 feet away. Each creature within 10 feet of that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

CRIMSON ENGINEER

Medium Humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 27 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

Skills Arcana +4, Investigation +4, Thieves' Tools +4

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, plus one other language

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Magic Resistance. The Crimson Engineer has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Aether Saboteur. The Crimson Engineer has advantage on ability checks made to disarm magical traps or devices.

Spellcasting. The Crimson Engineer is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The Crimson Engineer has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): mending, resistance

1st level (4 slots): detect magic, shield, absorb elements

2nd level (2 slots): dispel magic

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Crimson Engineer makes two attacks with its aether disruptor.

Aether Disruptor. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have disadvantage on spell attacks and can't cast spells that require a somatic component until the end of its next turn.

MECHANICAL SOLDIER

Medium Construct, unaligned

Armor Class: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 26 (4d8 + 8)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Aether Powered. The Mechanical Soldier's attacks are considered magical. When the Mechanical Soldier is reduced to 0 hit points, it releases the stored aether energy, and each creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Antimagic Susceptibility. The Mechanical Soldier is incapacitated while in the area of an antimagic field. If targeted by dispel magic, it must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or have its speed reduced to 0 and be unable to make reactions until the end of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Mechanical Soldier makes two attacks with its Blade or two attacks with its Aether Bolt.

Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Aether Bolt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) force damage.

REACTIONS

Reactive Plating. When the Mechanical Soldier is hit by a melee attack, it can use its reaction to temporarily harden its aether-infused plating, reducing the damage taken by half.

SPELLS

The following new spells were presented in this adventure.

AETHERIC BURST

5th-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (an aetherite shard)

Duration: Instantaneous

You send a concentrated ball of aether energy to a point you can see within range. The energy erupts in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point. Each creature in the area must make a Constitution saving throw. A target takes 8d6 force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Additionally, unsecured objects that are completely within the area of effect are automatically pushed 10 feet away from the center.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 5th.

AETHERIC PULSE

2nd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (15-foot cone)

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You release a burst of aether energy in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw. A target takes 3d6 force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Additionally, on a failed save, the target is pushed 10 feet away from you.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

AETHERIC SHIELD

4th-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 minute

You create a shimmering shield of aether energy around you. For the duration, you have resistance to force, thunder, and lightning damage, and you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

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