



ENsider Presents:

Revelations from the Mouth of a Madman Part Two

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



Act Two: Cheating Encouraged

IN THIS ACT, BRUSE SHANTUS, THE MINOTAUR RULER of Ber, challenges the party to compete with the Obscurati for the right to meet Tinker Oddcog, but the gnome has prepared a surprise for them all...

Rules of the Game

Social. Real-Time. Level 12.

Bruse Shantus explains the game he wants the party to play.

The party receives their audience with the Bruse, though the exact timing of the audience depends on how well they did in the Adulthood Challenge. The Bruse engages the PCs in small talk about the jobs of RHC agents or their adventures on the Avery Coast Railroad (he has halfway decent spies of his own) before he gets down to business.

He gives the party a chance to plead their case, then explains that Lya Jierre is also interested in Oddcog, and that she is offering him a state-of-the-art Danoran warship and Danoran engineers to aid in building railroads and future warships. He'll try to wheedle some equally lavish offers out of Risur through the PCs, then eventually laughs and admits that he has something more interesting in mind.

Lya at Court.

Lya Jierre has been at the court about a day by the time the party has arrived, and she has charmed the Bruse with light gossip regarding the events in Risur. She has a pair of noncombatant attendants with her—a female wizard named **Inez**, and a male porter named **Ulrik** who carries the luggage needed by a prestigious tiefling woman.

She always wears her weapons, and has a small case of syringes tucked into her coat. This is *needlewire*, a magic serum. When the silvery fluid is injected in a person it allows the head of the Obscurati, Nicodemus the Gnostic, to remotely take control of that person's body for anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. Lya only uses it if she has a vital lead and wants to pass it along to the Obscurati so urgently that she cannot spare the time for a normal *sending*.

The serum only grants Nicodemus control and sensory information. He cannot manifest any of his powers. Lya's porter has volunteered to take any needed injections, but it can work on any willing (or unconscious) subject. If the party gets their hands on this and uses it, Nicodemus recognizes the party and talks with polite caution, but he sees no reason to stick around.

Meet the Judges.

Shantus introduces his vizier, Zarkava, and his Minister of Dragon Affairs, Kenna, along with his honorary Minister of Rebellion, Pardo. If Glaucia is present, she snarls and visibly bristles at the other gnoll, who hails from the tribe that destroyed her home years ago. The Bruse asks if she's all right, then laughs when he remembers

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

my gaming group, who kept offering feedback even after everyone died while playtesting Adventure Four; 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 ENSIDER whose support has made this Fifth Edition update possible.

OPEN GAME CONTENT

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how the two know each other. The irritated Glaucia does nothing to disturb the audience, however.

The Bruse explains that Zarkava and Kenna will help him decide which team he should allow to speak with Tinker. Zarkava is concerned about the nation's prosperity and security, while Kenna has a clear handle on its finances. Bruse Shantus sees himself as the heart of the country. Therefore, head, heart, and purse-strings will each have one vote, based on their opinion of the two parties.

To give the judges time to decide, Shantus decrees two challenges for the foreigners. The winner of each challenge will earn a bonus vote, resulting in a total of five votes: two based on who wins the challenges, two from the Bruse's advisors, and one from the Bruse himself.

Fair Play.

If the PCs are here after winning the Adulthood Challenge, the Bruse now demands the party promise to wait until sunrise so he can explain the rules and ensure a fair start for the two groups. Alternately, if the PCs failed the Adulthood Challenge, Lya's group already has a head start and the Bruse goes ahead and explains the rules, which are as follows.

First, neither group may leave the grounds of the summer court before sunrise on the next day. If the PCs lost the Adulthood Challenge, this means that Lya's group has already spent half a day planning and making contacts, and the party is already behind.

Second, if any member of either group or anyone affiliated with them attempts to locate or contact Tinker before the contest is properly concluded, the offending group will be disqualified and will earn the ire of Shantus and his nation. No cheater will be allowed to meet with the gnome, and anyone who acted in bad faith will be named an enemy of Ber.

Third, if any member of one team attacks anyone on the opposing team, the attackers will be disqualified as above. Shantus grins here and admits he's open to a bit of clever byplay – a little spirited *tête-à-tête* conducted via third parties is fine, but as Ber is a civilized nation, he won't tolerate violence.

If the PCs decide to harangue the Bruse over the specifics of this rule, he says that team members may not attack one another or be the cause of violence upon one another, and that the "team members" include an equal number of participants on each side. For example, if there are five PCs then the opposing team includes Lya, Merton, Rush, and Lya's two attendants Inez and Ulrik. The rule is meant to keep combat from being a factor in the challenges, so encourage the players to play along and remind them what they'll lose if they find themselves disqualified. Perhaps a timely *sending* from the RHC arrives.

First Challenge.

The nearly completed Cantabrilla Railroad will connect the nation's east and west coasts across peaceful territory so that freight won't have to travel along the more hostile southern coast, which includes land claimed by the unincorporated gnoll tribes. The railroad's length will come to 325 miles, and it will directly connect the cities of **Reo Pedresco** and **Renza**.

To motivate its fast completion, the Ministry of Dragon Affairs hired two companies to complete the railroad: **Griento Railways**

built westward out of Renza, and **Liss Rail Construction** built eastward out of Reo Pedresco. Whenever a company completed 25 miles of the railroad on schedule, it earned a bonus, and as the two groups near the central linkage point, the Bruse is offering even greater bonuses to whichever company completes its half of the railroad first. (Picture the Transcontinental Railroad in the United States and you've got the idea.)

Currently the heads of the two lines are separated by 36 miles, and each side can lay one or two miles of track per day. Going is rough because the route passes through the central riverlands, rugged terrain full of steep gulleys carved by numerous rivers and streams.

The Bruse will award one vote to the first group that lays 18 miles of track. He assigns the PCs to help Liss Rail Construction and Lya's group to Griento Railways.

Cronyism.

The PCs may already know the head of Griento Railways, **Damata Griento**, and they can try to persuade the Bruse to switch. Lya likely doesn't know of the party's association with the half-orc, but she assumes the party wouldn't ask if it wasn't advantageous, so she counters their arguments. If necessary, simple opposed Charisma (Persuasion) checks might suffice.

Logistics.

Give the group **Player Handout—Cantabrilla Challenge**. It explains the costs of building miles of track, some of the options they have to accelerate things, and the consequences of various forms of sabotage.

Second Challenge.

The "Riven Sea of Gold," *Marrajado de Oro*, forms part of the border between Risur and Ber. For centuries Risur had to defend against naval attacks by the dragon tyrants and later by Ber's orcish warlords. But times have been peaceful since Vairday Bruse united the nation.

However, the current executive authority there, **Cavallo de Guerra**, is a thorn in Bruse Shantus's side. He's refusing to pay a fair share for the construction of the Selestala Railroad, which will link his capital city Citado Cavallo with Seobriga. This is just the latest dispute.

The Bruse tasks the PCs with convincing Cavallo to make a public pledge of loyalty and to agree to pay for his share of the Selestala route. He tasks Lya's group with discrediting Cavallo by convincing him to launch an attack on Risuri territory, specifically the fort **Manhill**, which has long defended against orcish attacks. Whichever happens first earns its team a vote.

Courtly Aid

Social. Montage. Level 9.

Before departing, the party can get help from Shantus's ministers.

The Bruse offers cottages on the grounds to each group, but doesn't want to spend much time clarifying rules because he's going out stargazing with a fine telescope Lya gave him as a gift.



The party might wish to retire so they can scheme in private. Some PCs might offer to accompany the Bruse, but unless a PC has made a good impression he doesn't want some stranger hanging around ruining his evening. The Bruse heads out, leaving a harpsichordist playing in his court until the place clears out.

Other PCs might seek to bend the ears of Zarkava and Kenna (metaphorically, since reptilian ears don't bend so well), either to get advice or to bargain for their vote. Glaucia can provide some insight, and curious PCs might also speak with Pardo, though neither of them have any influence over the game. The party might also try to spy on Lya's group; they're certainly spying on the party.

Competitive Guys.

After Shantus announces his game, Merton and Rush approach the party. Rush is amused at the chance to taunt enemies since the Bruse is protecting them, and he drags along Merton, who is annoyed at his partner's levity. Rush snidely congratulates the party on evading their ambushes, and then asks their honest opinion: which one was better?

He explains that his friend Merton sent some giant monsters after them, whereas he had their guide arrested and just tried to kill them himself. Rush tries to rub in any actual damage he might have caused, and demonstrates a callous disregard for any of his allies who might have died.

After a bit of trash-talking, Lya snaps at Rush to stop being so discourteous. Then the three of them depart to a guest cottage.

Stargazing.

The Bruse heads out to a high field, with a loose cadre of 20 guards plus a few courtiers who are legitimately enthusiastic about looking at the planets. Tonight the red light of Jiese is passing above the edge the full moon, but with a telescope Jiese's flaming surface appears to shine through the moon's glassy skin, creating a faint red nimbus around a fraction of its edge.

Shantus and his courtiers spend the night drinking and talking about how Ber would fare in a war. Then they get some of the guards to headbutt each other, betting on who lasts longest. It's unseemly for respectable, civilized folks like the Bruse and his courtiers to actually fight themselves, but they gladly use common folk as entertainment.

Zarkava.

Zarkava gladly talks philosophy of rulership with the party but she isn't looking for any favors. In fact, she's coolly offended at the inference that she can't handle her own affairs without some "heroes" coming in and showing the "primitives" how to get things done.

The lizardfolk vizier's intention is to vote based on the best interest of Ber. The Bruse's game embarrasses her, and she hopes it doesn't cause damage to any vital infrastructure.

If there is an eschatologist in the party, however, Zarkava will ask for a moment of their time and try to elicit their impression of the Bruse. She worries that her ruler's distance from the common people – traditionally a fine stance for a king – is angering Berans, who want to see themselves as part of a movement, not merely subjects. She wonders whether it might be best to have another sitting in Shantus's place.

Kenna.

Kenna is more excited about the game, and will gladly offer to exchange tips for promises of aid for the Beran coffers or military. Since Lya has offered to provide Ber with five Danoran warships (valued at 50,000 gp total), Kenna makes a personal visit later in the evening. She'll tip off the tiefling to the lair of Cheshimox at Abismo Condendado (see page 12).

If the party can promise similar aid (or at least convince her they can deliver), she might gossip about Cavallo de Guerra's history with the Bruse, and drop the secret that an illness spreading through the region has afflicted some of Cavallo's grandchildren. She won't give the party the same tip about Cheshimox, since doesn't want to betray Lya and risk losing the warships, though if the PCs offer a ridiculous price, she might change her tune.

Make a point to emphasize that Kenna grazes as she chats, constantly nibbling on whatever's available. When the party returns at the end of this act, she will have been replaced by a duplicant. The duplicant keeps up the pretense of eating, but does so with intentional effort that might be noticed by canny PCs.

Kenna also invites any fit-looking PCs to join her for a pre-dawn jog. Every day she and a few of the court guards jog to the nearby military base, then new guards join her for the jog back. It will be on one of these jogs, several days from now, that Kenna gets abducted and replaced by the duplicant. Her actual body will be delivered to Isla dolas Focas via the military base's secret teleportation circle.

Kenna does not like guns; she considers them unheroic. She particularly does not like gunsmiths. Martial scientists, however, are kindred spirits. If one goes jogging with her, she'll take them by the local army shooting range and practice dodging bullets. This lets martial scientist PCs learn the Vigilante Sprint technique (see New Magic Items in Part Three).

Glaucia and Pardo.

Glaucia glares daggers at her fellow gnoll Pardo for awhile, then departs shortly after the Bruse. She goes to the gathered petitioners outside, preferring their company. If the party seeks her counsel she'll offer it freely: no matter how valuable this gnome might be to Risur, it is better to stick to one's honor than to dance for Shantus's amusement.

She knows they'll be tempted to sabotage Lya's team, but she warns them that if their plans wind up harming any of the citizens of Ber, she will find out and will see to it that appropriate compensatory – if not punitive – measures are applied.

Pardo, for his part, ignores Glaucia and simply stands at the edge of the room, observing. He is eerily silent, and if spoken to he turns any conversation toward the topic of his cult's beliefs. He says the court is weak, and if the head of a beast is feeble, the beast can easily be slain. When the conversation grows boring he excuses himself, drawing a kerchief as he leaves so that he does not have to touch the metal doorknob with his bare hands.

The gnoll should really radiate untrustworthiness, ideally so much so that the party assumes he's too obviously trouble, and so won't suspect him of anything actually surprising. The Bruse, after all, keeps him around as a sign of how open and progressive he is, and how little he fears the gnolls.



Spirit Medium Senses.

Any spirit medium PC senses something odd with Pardo's soul, like it's stretched out and pointing to the south. It's common knowledge in Ber that Pardo comes from an island to the south, *Isla dolas Focas*.

Cottage Espionage.

The party's sturdy cottage is the epitome of rustic comfort, for all that it comes with a private chef and a maid. Lya's equally fine cottage is a quarter mile away. The Bruse stations three guards (each with *Insight +8* and *Perception +8*) around each cottage to deter shenanigans, but Lya's team isn't deterred at all.

Merton calls a handful of small local birds to him and uses a bit of magic to get them to watch the party's goings-on. It's unlikely that the PCs realize that these birds, of all the ones flitting about the grounds, are watching them (DC 25 *Wisdom (Perception)*; DC 23 for adventurers also proficient with *Nature*). At dawn the birds return to Merton and report what they noticed.

Rush arranges a small bit of sabotage. He expects the party will try teleporting away first thing in the morning, so he passes a message to the maid of the PCs' cottage. A lavish bribe of 500 gp gets the maid to look for a way to sneak a loop of gold thread into the clothes of one or two PCs. Since even paranoid PCs likely take off some of their clothes to sleep in such a comfortable setting, the maid might be able to slide the thread in the rolled-up cuff of a coat, pant-leg, or high boot. The sabotage is practically unnoticeable unless a character explicitly searches his or her clothing and gear for gold loops or rings (*Wisdom (Perception)* DC 20). If a PC finds one, consider giving all PCs advantage on checks to find any others, because now they know what to look for.

If the party does teleport away in the morning, anyone whose clothes were sabotaged in this way will get left behind, splitting the party awkwardly. The nearest teleportation circle is back in *Seobriga*.

Having Doubts.

If a PC manages to eavesdrop on Lya's cottage, he can hear her expressing her uncertainty about the Bruse's game. She reminds everyone that what they're doing is for the greater good of the whole world, and so if they must harm people, even innocent Berans, to get to Tinker, it's justified.

Rush snarkily tries to change the subject by going outside and yelling at one of the guards to get them some wine. He makes a thorough circuit of the cottage looking for anyone hiding (DC 22 *Dexterity (Stealth)* check to remain unseen), then goes back inside and suggests they start planning.

Dropping Eaves.

Lya's group will come up with more plans later, but for the next few minutes they talk of their goals, and decide they'll use *sending* to order their ship *Lux Profectusque* to *Citado Cavallo*. In the morning they'll use Inez's teleportation magic to hop first to *Renza*, so they can get more information about the railroad. Lya suggests focusing on solving problems to get things done faster, but Rush scoffs and argues that sabotage and disruption of the other railroad company is the only tactic that makes sense.

Winning Votes.

You win the Bruse's vote by being entertaining. Alternately, if you are incredibly persuasive and upstanding, you *might* be able to convince him to actually like you as opposed to seeing you as fun. But you still have to show that you have a sense of humor about the whole game.

You win Zarkava's vote by doing the most for the stability and defense of the country. She actually seeks the advice of *Glauca*, so if the party has impressed her, they might win the vizier's vote.

You win Kenna's vote by appealing to her personally. She likes making deals, and votes for whomever she thinks she can have the best business relationship with.

After a day at the railroad, Lya (with Inez and Ulrik) will teleport to *Citado Cavallo*. She makes a suggestion that impresses *Rush*: use enchantment magic to convince some of *Cavallo*'s sea captains to launch an attack, and trust that *Cavallo* will be too proud to admit the men acted without his orders.

At this point (after about 10 minutes of talking) the guard returns with wine, and Kenna *Vigilante* is with him (*Perception +9*). She gives her tip to Lya about the lair of *Cheshimox*, and they share a drink. Once Kenna leaves, Lya's group spends the next hour devising methods to trick the ghouls in the swamp to attack the party, or at least the workers of the *Liss* railroad.

May the Best Team Win.

Before it gets so late that people start heading to bed, Lya makes a point to visit the party and talk to them. She trusts them to act honorably unless they've shown otherwise in the past.

If given the chance, she talks straight with them. Or rather she pretends to. She explains that while the *Obscurati*, of which she is a member, has by necessity used secrecy and subterfuge, she is not comfortable with these tools – this is a lie, as she's a politician and moreover a *Jierre*. Subterfuge is practically in her genes (and her *Bluff* check is +15.)

She says that she was raised to value reason, progress, and the power of words over arms. Toward that end, she wants to explain why she's doing what she's doing, in hopes that the party will agree that her motives are honorable.

She admits that her organization lost control of its colossus, and that they want it under control again. She claims the colossus was meant to be a peacekeeping weapon, to deter *Risur* from attacking, as it is capable of defending against assaults even in the *Dreaming* or the *Bleak Gate*. She encourages the PCs to recognize that because it is such an effective deterrent, it could never be deployed, because it would provoke a backlash from every country, afraid they might be its next target. Though it is powerful, it can't be everywhere at once, and so the moment it went on the offensive, it would ensure *Danor*'s destruction.

With absolute deterrence, however, there wouldn't be a need for further war. Certainly, armies would continue to train and prepare, but no one would dare fight. There would be peace.

But now the colossus is loose, damaged, and out of control. Luckily it seems disinclined to raze any cities, but really it is safest if the colossus is not brought under the *Obscurati*'s control. She implores the party to step aside and let her find Tinker. She says she only wants to speak to Tinker to find out how to gain control of



Overview: Obscurati Schedule

We suggest the following timeline for Lya, Merton, Rush, and their allies' activities in these two challenges.

- **Before Dawn on Day 1.** Lya arranges via *sending* for 50 Crisilyri mercenaries to teleport to Renza and ride the train to the Griento railhead. A group of five Obscurati specialists teleport to Reo Pedresco and start making contacts and allies. She also *sends* to the Obscurati leadership details of her plan for Cavallo de Guerra, which will require them to hire a mind mage. *Lux Profectusque* sails for Marrajado de Oro.
- **Day 1.** Lya's aide teleports her to Citado Cavallo at dawn. She contacts Cavallo de Guerra and warns him of the Bruse's game so he'll be suspicious of the PCs. Merton, Rush, and the two aides teleport to Renza. They arrive at the end of the day at the railhead of Griento Railways. Merton explains that as a favor for the Bruse they'll be here helping finish the railroad sooner, and that spies have learned that a group of hostiles, possibly in the employ of Surtan Liss, are targeting the railroad. Damata accepts their help. The Obscurati give him 10 Money.
- **Day 2.** Lya's mercenaries split up to defend the Griento bridges from sabotage, so any bridge has 10 defenders (use the core rules statistics for **veterans**). Merton and Rush coordinate. A powerful enchantress from the Malice Lands named **Jacale**, hired by the Ob, teleports to Citado Cavallo. She contacts **Commodore Thrag Vidalia** and arranges to take a trip on his ship the next day.
- **Day 3.** Merton and Rush set out on horseback to scout the wastelands to the north, looking for the lair of Cheshimox. *Lux Profectusque* arrives at Citado Cavallo. Jacale magically compels Thrag Vidalia to attack the Risuri fort at **Manhill**. Lya departs aboard her ship *Lux Profectusque*, hoping to be out of the region before Cavallo de Guerra learns of the trickery.

- **Day 4.** Merton and Rush find Cheshimox's lair. The Ob agents in Reo Pedresco make contact with bandits along the Liss railroad line, and provide the proper bribes to get them to attack the Liss line, scattering workers and creating delays.
- **Day 5.** The bandits start attacking Aigotsura, the staging town nearest the Liss railhead. They return intermittently, hopefully drawing the party's attention. Meanwhile, Merton and Rush ride to the Liss railhead. Merton, as a native Beran, tries to sow distrust of the PCs among the workers. If not stopped, the crews become unfriendly, and might refuse aid or even attack the Steam Crew. Rush sneaks onto one of the supply trains and plants single-use *immovable rods* in the undercarriages of each of three cars, so that the train won't move any faster than human walking pace, no matter how hard the engine tries. Until the rods are removed, Liss cannot receive new Materiel. The two men try to avoid the party and leave before nightfall.
- **Day 6.** Merton and Rush reach the Griento railhead and wait to react to the party.
- **Variable.** Once the party gets within 8 miles of their goal, if it's uncertain who will win, Merton and Rush ride to near the Liss railhead, then to the lair of Cheshimox. Rush sneaks in, strikes down the head of the undead lizardfolk, then flees. He and Merton use magic to cover their trail as they return to the Griento railhead. The lizardfolk follow their "arrival" trail and find the Liss construction team. They attack under cover of night.
- **Variable.** Once the party gets within 4 miles of their destination, if the outcome is still uncertain, the Obscurati skulks in Reo Pedresco arrange for a supply train to derail while crossing a bridge, which counts as a mishap. The damage to the bridge shuts down deliveries of Materiel for a day.

the colossus (also a lie; she has orders to kill the gnome so he can't reveal the vulnerabilities or specifications of the titan, which might let the RHC figure out its purpose and thwart the Obscurati.)

In exchange, she promises that she won't play along with the Bruse's little game, and specifically she won't bother to try to get Cavallo to attack Risur. She dislikes the minotaur ruler, distrusts his motives, and won't shed innocent blood just to entertain him.

Party Reaction.

If the PCs believe her, she hides her surprise well, and thanks them. Presumably the party can stick around and eventually help save the day against the duplicants at the end of this act.

If (more likely) they choose not to believe her and decline her offer, she asks them why, listens to their reply, then makes it clear that she views them as rivals in the Bruse's silly game, not enemies. She wishes them luck with a sincere "May the best team win."



Obscurati Recruitment.

Though not necessarily while at court, Lya is willing to extend an offer to any PCs she suspects might be sympathetic to the Ob's goals. In particular she keeps an eye on eschatologists. If she can get a private moment with an eschatologist or another character she deems erudite and thoughtful, she opens with the question, "What would the world be like if everyone agreed with you?"

Lya will not – and indeed, due to a *geas* cannot – tell the PC what the Ob's actual plans are, but she can explain that the Obscurati are enlightened thinkers who want to make the world a better place. She'll argue that of all people a philosopher and intellectual would be better served joining them than spending his days fighting and bleeding.

If the PC is legitimately interested (or successfully feigns interest; note that in this case Lya's Insight bonus is +8), Lya asks him to throw the game, so that Lya's group gets first shot at speaking with Tinker. In exchange, Lya arranges for the PC to be invited to meet others in her cell and learn more, and in addition she'll devise a suitable cover story that will get the PC out of the country, allegedly investigating some lead, but with enough time to decide whether to fully join the Obscurati. If he does, Lya is sure that the conspiracy could make use of his help as a double agent, disrupting the RHC's investigation.



Overview: Cantabrilla Railroad

The total line will be 325 miles, and when complete a train will be able to travel from Reo Pedresco to Renza in a day. There aren't any major cities along the way yet, just a few towns and numerous villages, but Ber expects new growth.

Liss Rail Construction has built 128 miles of track from Reo Pedresco. Griento Railways has built 161 miles from Renza. The camps of the two companies are 36 miles apart at the start of the challenge. You'll want to refer to **GM Handout – Cantabrilla Route Map** to track progress as the days go by.

If neither side got involved, Liss would cover his 18 miles in 22 days, slowed down by rivers and low cash on hand. Griento takes 21 days, plagued by bandits and rough terrain but benefiting from higher morale.

Traveling to the Challenge.

It's about 300 miles overland from the Summer Court to Renza, and of course another 325 to Reo Pedresco. Sailing the thousand miles from Seobriga to Reo Pedresco might take a fast ship only three days under ideal conditions. But the fastest option is to teleport. The cities at both ends of the railroad have teleportation beacons, and the existing rails can get to their respective camps in 8 hours.

Construction Procedure.

Each company has a home city (Reo Pedresco or Renza) and two "staging towns" along their route. Though the railroads are normally just one set of tracks, to allow for two-way traffic these staging towns have small stretches of tracks where trains can pass.

Typically a train leaves the home city shortly before noon, gets to the railhead just before dusk, and then stays overnight. The next day it rolls alongside the workers, bringing supplies with them as they build more track, and then departs in mid-afternoon, making room for the next day's train. It returns to the home city in the middle of the night and is reloaded. This provides enough material for the railroad to build about a mile per day, with a little left over.

The workers create the grade, a long mound of dirt covered in a layer of crushed stone ballast. They place 8-foot-long wooden railroad ties (sleepers, in non-American parlance) into the ballast, then secure the rails to the ties with iron spikes. The company works in stages with some men laying the grade at the front, then behind them those placing ballast, then the ties, then rails, and finally the spikes.

The hammering of the spikes resounds across the whole railhead, reminding the crews to keep working. Those who can hammer consistently for long stretches of time are paid much better than the average worker, because they help keep everyone else focused.

Camps.

A total of over 200 workers are present in each camp, plus a dozen armed guards and a variety of specialists like engineers, mages, and a circulating roster of doctors, entertainers, and *executores dola liberta*. The camps keep a few dozen spears and bows handy for the workers to use, in the totally unlikely event that some savage megafauna beast attacks.

Ten-Mile Day.

In the real world during the construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad in the United States, one company managed to lay ten miles of track in one day. If your party wants to replicate the feat, they'll need to handle complex logistics.

An extra-long train will leave the home city at 4 AM laden with supplies, with an engine on both ends. It reaches the first staging town at 8 AM, where it waits for a train headed back to the home city to pass. It continues to the second staging town, gets there at noon, and lets a second train pass it.

It reaches the railhead at 4 PM, delivers its supplies, and then heads back as quickly as possible. It passes the same trains as before, at 8 PM and midnight, and then it returns to its home city at midnight.

In this way, three sets of supplies are delivered each day, each carrying three times the normal supply size. Of course doing this is hugely taxing on the workers loading and unloading the trains, not to mention those building the railroad. See Player's Handout—Cantabrilla Challenge for the rules.

Typically there are three worker shifts: one resting, one assembling the railroad, and one tending to camp – including moving the camp, usually every two or three days. Each shift works for 4 hours, then switches, so the whole work day spans 12 hours.

Obstacles.

The region has many rivers and at this point both camps have gotten the construction of bridges down pat. Each camp has at least two spellcasters who can cast *stone shape*, so laying the pilings goes very quickly. Assembling the wooden truss of the bridge is comparably easy and the rivers are typically less than 100 feet wide so an entire bridge can usually be finished in about 5 days.

The terrain also has intermittent spire-like mountain ridges, called *serra*. Though seldom higher than 500 feet, they're too steep to go over so the railroad must tunnel through. Most of these tunnels are completed well in advance by combinations of magic and explosives, but Griento Railways still has a few days of clearing ahead of them for an obnoxious mile-long series of tunnels.

Bandits have sometimes attacked, but the camps have plenty of guards so mostly they're left alone. Partnerships with the locals living in nearby towns alert the companies of any possible megafauna that might cause trouble.

Liabilities.

If one desired to disrupt the railroad construction, the key targets would be the mages, the existing bridges, and the trains themselves. How much trouble is possible is only limited by how evil one wants to be.

The mages are closely guarded in camp, but by necessity have to operate ahead of the main group sometimes, leaving them exposed. They're not great combatants, and the camp guards are poor matches for attackers of the PCs' level. If murder's not acceptable, kidnapping, infection, cursing, or bribery might work. Of course there are other mages available in Ber or beyond, though they can be expensive to replace.

Sufficient explosives could take out a bridge, completely stopping forward progress until the bridge could be replaced. Worse,



all the workers are on one side of the river, and the supplies will be coming from the other side of the river. If egregious destruction is not desired, simple sabotage might just make the bridge unstable, deterring the train engineers from going over it until it's fixed.

Finally, a derailed train (or better yet, a train plunging into a river when the bridge beneath it explodes) is a huge setback, particularly if the derailment makes other engineers worry that it's no longer safe to keep working. Less severe options include tearing up track (the train stops and has to fix the track, throwing off everyone's schedule), sabotaging the boiler in a way the engineer will notice so he can stop it before it explodes, or blowing up the spare set of tracks in the staging towns so only one train can use the track at a time.

Running the Cantabrilla Challenge.

The GM Handout – Cantabrilla Route Map shows where key locations are and what they entail. The Player Handout – Cantabrilla Challenge gives an overview of the basic rules.

To win, a side needs to build 18 miles first. Additionally, bridges require extra engineering, materials, and construction time: each bridge is equivalent to 5 miles of track.

Resources used to build are abstract: Money, Materiel, and Morale. 1 Money is roughly equivalent to 25,000 gp. 1 Materiel is enough supplies to build a mile of track. 1 Morale is needed for each extra mile workers build beyond the first in a given day.

The party can acquire more resources for their side, take away the other side's resources, or try other tactics that are more up to GM adjudication. In general, if they spend a day on a plan, it should add 1 or 2 extra resources. The challenge is coming up with useful tactics and thwarting the Ob's own efforts while not neglecting the Marrajado de Oro Challenge.

Building.

Each day the PCs can build the first mile of track for 1 Materiel. Each mile thereafter costs 1 Materiel and 1 Morale.

Bridges count as 5 miles of track. They're just easier to destroy and control than a wide swath of track.

Profiting.

Each day the PCs get 1 Money for each mile they built the previous day.

Surtan Liss. Though this lizardfolk entrepreneur lacks any real talent for technology, he is drawn to it, and he has the money to afford it, inherited from his late father who according to rumors was one of the greatest bandits of Ber's river lands.

Surtan bucks Beran standards—both traditional tribal beliefs and newer culture that looks to Danor or Risur. He's rude, smug, and spends great effort to appear weird and novel. He has had small garnets set along his cheekbones, which sparkle in the light, a permanent adornment like tattooing but far more expensive. He's also learned to waggle his crest, and he likes to swallow small animals like mice whole, as though he's pretending to be a snake. He enjoys it when that sort of thing unsettles onlookers.



Supplying.

The party can spend 1 Money to order 1 Materiel. The next day it arrives. If they order more than 1 Materiel in a single day, there is a cumulative 5% chance of a mishap. A mishap causes 1d4 of the Materiel ordered not to arrive. The delivery train might derail, dock workers might riot, and so on.

Good Spirit.

The PCs can pay 2 Money to gain 1 Morale. The party might hire entertainers, provide a pay raise, or invest in comfier living accommodations.

Starting Resources.

Griento starts with 0 Money, 1 Materiel, and 6 Morale. The Obscurati provide 10 Money.

Liss starts with 2 Money, 2 Materiel, and 2 Morale. Benedict Pemberton is willing to sell Liss a Steam Crew for 10 Money. The Steam Crew can build 1 extra mile of rail per day without costing any Morale. Liss can't afford 10 Money, but the party might be able to get Pemberton to reduce his price to 1 Money now and 9 later, or offer some other payment.

Liss Rail Construction

Social. Real-Time. Level 9.

Will a lizardfolk businessman cooperate with the party?

The Bruse assigns the western end of the railroad to the PCs. The lizardfolk in charge of the operation, **Surtan Liss**, is staying at the staging town called **Aigotsura**, 40 miles west of the railhead. When the party arrives the town is in a tizzy, with most of the residents out gawking at a group of golems, 10 strong, as they busily assemble a mock length of track. Steam puffs out of their backs as arcane boilers provide the power to their work.

The golems are products of Benedict Pemberton, and he's trying to sell them to Liss. Pemberton claims they're made in Flint, but his operation in Flint has been shuttered for a few months due to the machinations of Harkover Lee. The golems were actually made in his factory on Isla dolas Focas, and Pemberton had them shipped hurriedly to Liss, hoping to take advantage of the lizardman's desperation.

Tough Sell.

Surtan Liss's construction company is lagging behind Griento Railways. In the first place, Liss's crews don't have the same high morale as Griento's, and in the second place, Liss doesn't have the cash to pay them to work harder. Some bad weather and an unfortunate derailment forced Liss to take out a loan for 200,000 gp, and if he doesn't make it to the 150 mile marker before Griento, he'll end up losing money on the venture as a whole. (Don't worry. He's still rich.)

Pemberton is trying to show Liss that his "Steam Crew" can work faster and, ultimately, cheaper than a normal living crew. Liss and Pemberton are out enjoying drinks – a guaro sour for Liss, and distilled water with a celery stick for Pemberton – as they watch the Steam Crew cart dirt, crush rocks, and lay ties and track.



Liss is impressed but Pemberton is asking 250,000 gp (10 Money, in terms of the Cantabrilla Challenge) for the whole crew of 10 steam workers. Liss can't afford it. The lizardman is hoping to show enough enthusiasm to get Pemberton expecting a deal, then offer to pay 10% up front (1 Money), and the rest upon completion of the railroad.

The party might interject themselves into the negotiations, offer another way to aid Liss to drive the price down, or perhaps challenge a golem to see who can hammer spikes faster (make five opposed Strength checks and total the results; the golem has Strength 20 and takes 10 every time, for a total of 75.) Success could provide a bargaining chip to help Liss get Pemberton to agree to an installment plan.

If the party helps out successfully, Liss can get his Steam Crew for the cost of 1 Money. Otherwise Pemberton won't sell. He departs and shows up 4 days later at the Griento railhead.

Ulterior Motive.

Pemberton is hoping to raise the profile of these machines, to get them spread around Ber at various work sites. He's planning to attempt his coup next year, at which point the golems would become a distributed army he can use to wreak havoc. However, he's also a businessman, and even aspirations to rule a nation of his own won't let him accept a massive loss.

While he's here, make sure he interacts with the party and makes a big impression. He's not really a bad gent. If the party proposes in his hearing that they sabotage the other side, Pemberton disapproves; he thinks it's more impressive to create than destroy.

If he gets wind the party is trying to track down Tinker, he plays it cool and wishes them luck, but asks if he can help in order to get a sense of how the party's mission is coming along. He'll definitely want to kill them later so they won't get in his way.

Helping Out Liss.

As long as the party is respectful and doesn't ask him for money, Liss will take whatever help they can offer.

Further Developments.

As detailed in Overview: Obscurati Schedule, eventually the Ob has bandits attack Aigotsura to try to distract the party. If they don't drive off the attack, it costs 1 Morale. Shortly thereafter Merton shows up to sow discontent, costing Liss 1 Morale and possibly make the workers distrust the party, while Rush sabotages a train with one-use *immovable rods*. This prevents further arrival of Materiel until the sabotage is undone.

If things get close, Merton and Rush trick a nearby cult of undead lizardfolk who guard a dead dragon's lair, and convince them Liss railroad is trying to drive them out, provoking an attack on the Liss railhead. This attack costs between 1 and 4 Morale, depending how severe it is.

If all else fails, Ob agents derail a train while crossing a bridge, costing 1d4 Materiel and possibly preventing further Materiel delivery.

Much of what happens in this challenge is up to the party and the GM must use their best judgment to determine how the Ob react.

Griento Railways

Social. Railroad. Level 9.

Can the party outmaneuver Lya Jierre's influence?

Lya's Obscurati group gets assigned the eastern end of the railroad. She decides that she's more valuable in the court of Cavallo de Guerra, so she sends the rest of her team to work with Damata Griento while she goes alone to Citado Cavallo.

Unlike Liss, Damata Griento stays with his workers at the railhead, and he only goes to the nearby staging town, **Negranha**, once a week to spend time with his wife **Ejeka**, daughter **Dabo**, and son **Tarro**. The town is more comfortable, but it's good for the crew's morale to have the boss around.

When Merton and Rush show up, they spin a lie that the party is working with Liss to sabotage Damata. Though Damata is a little wary of trusting outsiders, the Obscurati operatives tell him he doesn't need to give them anything; the Bruse is paying them for their service. Indeed, they hand over promissory notes worth 250,000 gp (the equivalent of 10 Money) to help fund Damata's project. He has a little spare materiel and high morale among his crew, but money is tight.

Merton and Rush head off the next morning to try to find the lair of the dragon Cheshimox. Inez and Ulrik stick around to keep an eye out for the party, and to report via *sending* so Lya can keep in touch with Merton and Rush.

Visit by the Party.

If the adventurers have played through Adventure Four, *Always on Time*, Damata is thrilled to see the party again. He gladly explains the situation with Merton and Rush and is confused as to whether the PCs – who after all *are* foreign agents – are here to sabotage his railroad. But he trusts them.

If the party has never met Damata before, he is suspicious of their motives but tries to stay friendly and open-minded. It is, though, hard to trust someone if they try to convince you not to accept a whole chunk of money.



Damata Griento. A middle-aged half-orc family man and would-be railroad tycoon, Damata nearly ruined his whole clan's livelihood when he was tricked by con men into taking out a massive loan he could not repay for a railroad through the Anthras Mountains. Desperate to avoid his debtors, he stole his clan's stash of magic weapons and would have delivered them if not for the unlikely intervention of dwarven philosopher Vlendam Heid and a group of strangers who helped him instead kill his debtors (see Adventure Four, *Always on Time*; depending on the party's actions, you might need to replace Damata with another orc).

Married with two kids, Damata returned home with a renewed bravery. To prove his trustworthiness to his clan, he aggressively pursued new business, and now is in charge of building the eastern branch of the Cantabrilla Railway, stretching from Reo Pedresco to Seobriga. He is beloved by his workers, and he makes an effort to find out what troubles them, then encourage them to find solutions by allying with others.

(If Damata died in Adventure Four, you should replace him with a dour, officious railroad bureaucrat named Venicio Brunaldo.)



Unlikely Altruism.

We anticipate most player groups will pursue the kind of tactics that their characters are typically good at—stand-up fighting, stealth and deception, and short-term trickery or deal-making. Yet the players might try a different approach.

For example, they might decide to do what's best for Ber, rather than for Risur. At the Cantabrilla Railroad, they could offer to help Ly'a's side by giving aid to Damata Griento's construction crew. By avoiding conflict they can help complete the railroad much sooner. Simple good intentions aren't sufficient, of course. To benefit from their altruism, the party would need to advertise it properly. Perhaps a journalist could help.

If they can get the public on their side, Shantus will be pressured to award them the point for the railroad challenge to save face. The move fits with Kenna's sense of decency, likely earning her vote.



Calling in a Favor.

The party might try to convince him to slow his crews. Unfortunately he's not solely in charge, and after his erratic behavior last year the elders of his family are watching closely. Several family members visit the construction camps, cycling through each week.

If his crews, which have worked excellently so far, suddenly started slowing down, his family would grow suspicious and might punish him. They would assume he had been paid by Surtan Liss, keeping a fat bribe all for himself instead of sharing the normal reward with the whole family.

Damata needs a convincing excuse if he's going to help the party. Perhaps the best one is provided by the Obscurati. When a small army of ghoulish lizardfolk attack the railroad (see *Burning the Midnight Oil*, below), Damata can claim that he's withdrawing to protect his company's investment. It would be even easier for him to justify if the party simultaneously has managed to persuade Cavallo to allow work on the Selestala Railroad, because the Grientos already have that contract.

Burning the Midnight Oil

Action. Tactical. Level 13.

Ghouls are tricked into attacking the party's camp.

As detailed in the Obscurati Schedule (page 6), this attack occurs shortly after the Liss railhead gets within 8 miles of the goal. Dark clouds appear on the horizon. Temperatures drop rapidly and Surtan Liss, who grew up on his bandit father's stories of the Keepers of Cheshimox, fears some dread force is coming. If the party isn't present he quickly contacts them with a *sending* spell, begging them to come protect his workers from the icy dead.

Of the many possible ways the Ob can disrupt the party, this one is perhaps the most potentially devastating. The GM might want to allow a little wiggle room to decide when this occurs so that the party is present.

If the party doesn't have anyone at the camp, they run the risk of Liss's camp being completely demolished. Worse, if the party is split up they might get into a fight they cannot win. If only part of the party is here, you might have the other players take on the roles of guards, with 8 Cantabrilla guards per PC. See Appendix Two: Berans (in Part Three) for statistics.

CHESHIMOX FORCES.

- 4 priests of Cheshimox
- 2 Cheshimox terrormasks
- 40 fast lizardfolk zombies
- The *Skull of Cheshimox*
- Variable number of Cantabrilla guards

Terrain.

Most likely the undead strike at the worker camp, where scores of tents sprawl in a 100-foot radius near the actual railhead. The terrain is fairly flat aside from the railroad itself, but the tents and piles of construction materiel create obstacles and hiding places.

If the party sallies forth to meet the attackers, they might instead battle away from the camp on craggier terrain, with towering cactuses and patches of spiky lechuguilla plants dotting the landscape.

Tactics.

The Cheshimox priests send the two terrormasks ahead to widely circle the camp and approach from the south. These ghouls have peeled away the skin on their faces and wear masks of tanned orc and lizardfolk faces harvested from other intruders.

The main body of ghouls waits out of sight to the north. Two wings of 20 ghouls each flank the sled upon which the 4 Cheshimox priests ride. A pair of ghostly beasts pull the sled; these are purely a magical creation and can neither attack nor be harmed.

When night falls, the ghouls to the north begin to howl and roar as they advance into view. They crest a hill at a range of 400 feet, then charge. At that moment the terrormasks begin attacking from the south, hoping to cause a panic and split any defenders.

The terrormasks rush into the midst a group of enemies, trying to paralyze as many foes as possible. If they can get a single target alone, they try to flank and tear them apart with sneak attacks.

The priests direct the horde to sweep through the camp, killing anyone they can reach while keeping their same general formation. They launch a barrage of spells and icicles from a distance, relying on their spears and breath weapons against enemies that venture too close. As a bonus action, one of the priests can either move the cart carrying the *skull of Cheshimox* 40 feet or turn it 90 degrees.

The priests can also use the following power of the skull, which is mounted on a swivel atop the sled. Activating it multiple times changes its orientation, but doesn't create multiple swaths of cold.

Freezing Blast. By using an action to activate the *skull of Cheshimox*, freezing cold fills an area extending from the skull in a straight line that is 60 feet long and 5 feet wide. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the area takes 14 (4d6) cold damage. The spray continues until the start of the next turn, at which point, if the skull's cold has not killed a creature during this activation, the skull deals 14 (4d6) necrotic damage to the creature that activated it.

**Cheshimox Terrormask**

Medium undead (lizardfolk), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)**Hit Points** 73 (12d8+12)**Speed** 30 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws DEX +7, INT +3**Skills** Athletics +10, Deception +4, Perception +9, Stealth +7, Survival +6**Damage Immunities** poison**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, poison**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19**Languages** Draconic**Challenge** 7 (2,900 XP)**Command Ghouls.** On its turn, the Cheshimox terrormask can automatically command all normal ghouls within 30 feet. Normal ghouls never attack the Cheshimox terrormask unless compelled.**Create Spawn.** Any creature killed by the Cheshimox terrormask that lies undisturbed until the next midnight rises as a ghoul at that time. The new ghoul is not under the control of its creator. A *protection from evil* or *gentle repose* spell cast on the corpse prevents this. Elves are immune to this trait.**Creepy Skin Mask.** The Cheshimox terrormask wears a 3-foot high mask of tanned, stitched-together humanoid faces. As long as it wears this mask, it does not detect as undead and is under the effects of a constant *nondetection* spell.**Evasion.** If the Cheshimox terrormask is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the Cheshimox terrormask instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.**Keen Smell.** The Cheshimox terrormask has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.**Sneak Attack.** Once per turn, the Cheshimox terrormask deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the Cheshimox terrormask that isn't incapacitated and the Cheshimox terrormask doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.**Turn Resistance.** The Cheshimox terrormask has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.**ACTIONS****Multiattack.** The Cheshimox terrormask attacks three times: once with its bite and twice with its claws.**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8+4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.**REACTIONS****Uncanny Dodge.** When an attacker that the Cheshimox terrormask can see hits them with an attack, the Cheshimox terrormask can use their reaction to halve the attack's damage against them.**Priest of Cheshimox**

Medium undead (lizardfolk), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)**Hit Points** 93 (11d8+44)**Speed** 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws DEX +5, WIS +7, CHA +5**Damage Resistances** slashing**Damage Immunities** poison**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, poison**Skills** Athletics +5, Perception +10, Religion +2, Stealth +5, Survival +7**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 20**Languages** Draconic**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)**Necrotic Wave (3/Short Rest).** As an action, the Priest of Cheshimox presents its unholy symbol and evokes fell energy that roils outwards, dealing 18 (4d8) necrotic damage to all living creatures within 30 feet. A DC 15 Wisdom saving throw halves this damage.**Spellcasting.** The Priest of Cheshimox is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The Priest of Cheshimox has the following spells prepared from the cleric's spell list:**Cantrips (at will):** *guidance, resistance, sacred flame, thaumaturgy***1st level (4 slots):** *command, detect magic, guiding bolt, shield of faith***2nd level (3 slots):** *blindness/deafness, enhance ability, spiritual weapon***Turn Resistance.** The Priest of Cheshimox has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.**ACTIONS****Multiattack.** The Priest of Cheshimox attacks three times: it makes three ranged attacks or attacks once with its bite and twice with its spear.**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.**Spear.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage or 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage if wielded with two hands.**Ice.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 40/80 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) cold damage.**Cold Breath (1/Day).** The Priest of Cheshimox exhales an icy blast in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 13 (3d8) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



Fast Lizardfolk Zombie

Medium undead (lizardfolk), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor, shield)

Hit Points 26 (4d8+8)

Speed 40 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Draconic

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the lizardfolk to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the lizardfolk drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The lizardfolk makes three melee attacks, each one with a different weapon.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) bludgeoning damage.

Spiked Shield. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Aftermath.

The undead fight to the last. If they manage to scatter the workers and defeat any defenders, they take any slain lizardfolk and transform them into ghouls. Then they arrange the other dead with various rail supplies into a totem resembling a dragon. Finally, they head east, intending to do the same to the Griento camp.

If the lizardfolk fall, the party might recover the *skull of Cheshimox*. An eschatologist PC feels an odd affinity to the skull, and can sense the way to the distant Frozen City of Knütpara, which makes an appearance in Adventure Seven, *Schism*.

Anyone who examines the skull or the sled finds carvings written in Abyssal. Perceptive PCs might recognize characters they saw once before on the bone-carved rifle owned by dwarven assassin Kvarti Gorbatiy: “Cry out / for at the end of time / I rise.”

Consequences for Construction.

If the party defeated the lizardfolk before they could attack the work camp, Surtan Liss can add 1 Morale, and the meager loot left at the dragon’s lair totals 25,000 gp (1 Money) if the party is looking to help out.

If the camp gets attacked but the lizardfolk are defeated in less than 10 rounds, the camp suffers no Morale loss. For every 10 rounds the fight persists, though, the camp loses 1 Morale, to a maximum of 4. Alternately, the GM might track casualties to clutter a battle map with scores of panicking NPCs. For every 20 workers killed, the camp should lose 1 Morale.

The Keepers of Cheshimox.

The white dragon Cheshimox originally hailed from north of Drakr, but 600 years ago he flew to what is today Ber, seeking to prove himself against the other dragon tyrants. He brought with him ice carved from a glacier surrounding one of undead giants that once ruled the tundras, and he deposited that perpetual ice in a lakeside cave, **Abismo Co-dendado**, five miles north of where the Cantabrilla Railroad runs now.

With a dragon’s patience he slowly transformed a few square miles into his own private icescape in the middle of a tropical badland. He conquered the lizardfolk servants of another dragon and transformed them into undead so they could resist the unearthly chill. When he was eventually slain, his servants endured and preserved his skull, hoping some day to return their master to unlife.

For a few decades the undead terrorized the Rio Gelado, sweeping along it at night in icy chariots, killing anyone foolish enough to camp along its shores. But treasure hunters sought dragon gold, and slowly attrition whittled down both their numbers and their treasure. Today only a few dozen remain. When Rush destroys their leader, they decide they are ready to end their existence, and they set out for a final battle.

Proactive Assault.

Should the party venture forth to eliminate the ghouls, they might find them preparing for their assault. The undead lizardfolk have reverently placed the *skull of Cheshimox* atop its sled, and perform rituals to call forth deadly cold weather. Frigid winds create a sheen of ice beneath the sled, even though the storm never gets quite cold enough for any snowfall to stick.

If the party engages at the frozen lake, the whole cult attacks en masse, using the terrormasks to drive the party close and attempting to overwhelm them with spells and claws. Alternately, if your players seem to expect they’ll be doing a dungeon crawl, you might change the focus to stopping the weather ritual. If the group seems eager for a direct assault on Cheshimox’s lair, they can fight through multiple cave chambers coated with ice, with cultists attacking from every direction.

Connecting the Railroad

Social. Real-Time. Level 1.

Sometimes people just want to celebrate.

If the party spares time to witness the connection of the railroad, it’s an all-day affair, with workers hammering out the last few hundred feet while dignitaries arrive by train. A drum-heavy mariachi-style band performs and everyone drinks as they wait for the last bit of track to be laid.

Eventually only five spikes are left, all along the same side of the railroad. The two heads of the respective companies – Surtan Liss and Damata Griento – expect a group of five dignitaries from various cities to do the honors, but they have colluded to give everyone a bit of entertainment. When it is time for the ceremony, the dignitaries hand Liss and Damata a sledgehammer, and challenge them to race to see who can drive in the middle spike first.

The two men start at the outer spikes, then hammer in the inner spikes, and then good-naturedly jostle for a chance to swing at the middle spike. They end up in an overly polite back-and-forth insistence that the other puts the spike in until finally Damata’s



wife sighs and pushes them aside so she can do it. The crowd cheers and then take turns signing a pair of huge posters that will travel around the country to promote the new railroad.

Overview: Cavallo de Guerra

Part of the idea of this challenge is to pull the rug out from under the party. We provide an array of possible ways to earn points with de Guerra, likely making the party expect a fair fight. Then, when Lya simply wins via mind control, it should shake up the game and show that the Obscurati are still a threat, even if the party has managed to thwart them so far.

To convince Cavallo de Guerra to pledge fealty to Bruse Shantus, the party needs two things. First, for him even to consider it, they have to do him a major favor so he owes them. And second, so he won't face a revolt by his sea chiefs, they need to offer him something politically or militarily useful in exchange.

Arranging a Trade.

The second step is actually simpler if the party contacts Risur to make a deal. A discreet alliance with Risur would give de Guerra leverage over the Bruse, especially if they can get him the blessing of Beshela, the Risuri archfey of the sea; this would allow his fleet to travel more widely, both for military and for mercantilism.

The party might instead get Cavallo steam-powered warships, or could try to ensure his legacy by getting his eldest daughter **Corta Nariz de Guerra** named as Bruse Shantus's chosen successor. Corta Nariz has overseen the logistics of the Beran navy, and though she has no combat experience she has maintained Ber's strength at sea with efficient management. Cavallo thinks she'd be an excellent Bruse, and even Shantus actually likes her.

Doing a Favor.

Cavallo has many concerns, but if the party can solve any of the following problems for him, it will earn his trust.

- **Find a Cure.** Cavallo's grandson **Altioro de Guerra** has become infected with dragon worm—the eldritch equivalent of the real-world parasite guinea worm. It is a disease of paupers and savages, and it resists magical treatment. The story is a disgrace, but a bit of public health work can restore the boy's good name while helping thousands dealing with the painful white worm.
- **Good Old-Fashioned Bug Hunt.** A few months ago Cavallo kicked a clan of goblins off of lands surrounding the volcanic caldera Lago Fuego, since he wanted to dredge up the hoard of the long-dead dragon tyrant **Furioso**. Ever since, outlying towns have been getting raided by strange monsters coming out of the mountains—ankhegs, cythillipedes, giant ants, and the like. What might seem like a quick side-quest gets complicated when the party learns that the goblins who control the bugs are just trying to reclaim their old land.
- **Halt Lya's Tricks.** If the party manages to stop Lya's mind control scheme and avoid a fight with Risur, Cavallo would be appreciative. If they manage to capture Lya, he'll even show his appreciation by bringing in **Glauca Evora** to savagely beat her.

Of course, give the party leeway if they have other clever ideas.

Welcome to Marrajado de Oro.

When Ber was founded, Cavallo was already a powerful warlord, commanding dozens of orcish warships in Marrajado de Oro, the sea that separates eastern Ber and Risur. Though mostly a rural mix of cliffs and coast, the region had been held together by Cavallo and his forebears after the fall of the dragon tyrants. Since he had the only real naval fighting force in the country, Cavallo profited greatly when Vairday Bruse made him admiral of the new nation's fleet.

Cavallo presided over more naval victories than losses during Ber's first few years, helping keep away would-be conquerors and establish vital shipping lanes that brought trade from other nations. He appreciated the prestige and was able to pay his followers enough that they would follow the nation's civilizing policies. But after years of mutual snubbing with the new Bruse, his region's income has slowed to a trickle, and there are calls by his lieutenants to return to the old ways of raiding the coasts of Risur and Elfaivar.

The region is less industrialized than Seobriga, but wealthier than most other parts of Ber, with lush hillside farms and some of the most temperate weather in the country. In the local capital

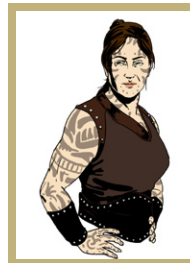


Cavallo de Guerra. An orcish warlord and self-proclaimed Champion of the Riven Sea of Gold, Cavallo de Guerra joined the first king of Ber, Vairday Bruse, in kickstarting the revolution toward civilization. He worked alongside Shantus, the current ruler, but Cavallo always thought the minotaur wasn't willing enough to simply kill those who stood in the way.

When Vairday Bruse chose to pass the crown to a minotaur rather than an orc, Cavallo refused to pledge fealty. Though he hasn't actively opposed Shantus, he continually snubs the minotaur's overtures.

At sixty-three years old, Cavallo is ancient by orc standards and wary of being deposed. He uses propaganda to portray himself as still youthful and vigorous; and throughout his region one can find statues of him astride bears, and murals of him trampling the bones of dragons. He often violently harasses visitors, much to the delight of his counselors, to see if they have the strength to stand up to his abuse.

Despite his aggression, he usually has several of his grandchildren by his side when in public, and he dotes on them with comical gentleness. If any of them start to act bratty or entitled, though, he's been known to literally throw them through walls, to show them that they have to earn their place in the world. Above all else he hates presumption.



Alonsa Frolián. Alonsa's goliath tribe controls parts of the Anthras Mountains on the border of Risur and Ber. After distinguishing herself as a beast trainer, she and Chupacabra, her trained dire mountain lion, went to work as liaisons to Cavallo de Guerra. She has the ability to lend her strength to others, and it is one of de Guerra's most closely guarded secrets that he relies on Alonsa to maintain his bold vigor in public. Oddly for

someone so highly ranked, Alonsa cares little for political power; she simply wants to be best at anything she applies herself to. The incongruous image of this towering woman reading small books of Danoran philosophy elicits some mockery from de Guerra's other advisors, but Alonsa laughs it off.



Citado Cavallo, average orcs work as fishermen or farmers, while the wealthy profit from controlling sea trade around Ber. The city is particularly famous for its beautiful bath houses, fed by an aqueduct from the nearby volcanic caldera Lago Fuego.

Castle of the Sea Chiefs

Social. Montage. Level 9.

The party looks for ways to convince an orc warlord to change his mind.

When the party arrives at Cavallo's seaside castle, he personally shouts down at them from the battlements, calling them dogs who lap at the hooves of Shantus and threatening to have his men kill them for having the audacity to dirty the ground of his city with their filthy paws. If the party stands up to him and appears bold, Cavallo gives a quiet signal to his advisor **Alonsa Frolián**, who suggests they be let in as foreign dignitaries. This lets Cavallo maintain the appearance of a bitter old man, when honestly he appreciates the attention.

He barks at his men to give the party a room next to Lya Jierre, and that he'll talk to them later; right now he's going to teach his granddaughter to wrestle.

Alonsa escorts them to their lodgings, which overlook the sea. The location is partially so they'll see his mighty navy, and partially because the view is beautiful, free of the smog of Flint or Seobriga.

The castle also hosts representatives of the Sea Chiefs, orc commanders with their own flotillas of warships who operate out of various coves along the coast. A few of the representatives come to the party between their arrival and the next major meal, hurling insults and questioning their bravery, or eyeing their more valuable possessions and asking how much they think their lives are worth.

Chatter.

The talk of the castle is the huge dragon's hoard that was recently recovered from near Lago Fuego, a volcanic caldera a few miles from the city. It hasn't even been fully appraised yet, so Cavallo keeps it under constant guard in his dining hall, and has had to move the dining room table out to the courtyard.

Mealtime Negotiations.

Cavallo will speak with the party at the next major meal. A large table is set up in the castle's courtyard, near a sunken pen where Alonsa's dire bear undergoes battle training against magical summoned monsters. As the party is being seated Cavallo's daughter Corta Nariz starts to bring out some of her children (Cavallo's grandkids), but when he spots his ill grandson Altioro, Cavallo glares and waves them off. Corta notices the guests, has a hand servant take Altioro away, then brings the rest of the family.

The party can easily spot a bandage on the child's leg, and with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check to recognize a wound-up splint as the sort used to extract dragon worm.

The meal gives the party an opportunity to pitch their case to Cavallo and get a sense of what the orc desires. Lya Jierre is here until Day 3, when she boards *Lux Profectusque*, and she'll likely be

Sea Chiefs.

Four chiefs serve Cavallo, and they coordinate their patrols of the Riven Sea of Gold through Cavallo's daughter Corta Nariz de Guerra. Successful captains go on to serve in the general Beran navy, where they try to make names for themselves so they might return to their home sea and succeed when a chief steps down. The current sea chiefs include:

- **Babaro**, Cavallo's second-in-command. He wears a minotaur-skull helmet.
- **Thrag Vidalia**, who has a cold vendetta against Risur for the sinking of his first ship.
- **Perorroso**, a druid who deploys sea creatures in combat.
- **Danovio**, who has great wealth from gold mines and seeks to acquire ironclad ships.

Shortcut to Victory?

The party has a very limited window here. Lya Jierre plans to just mentally dominate Thrag Vidalia and have him launch an attack on the Risuri fort at Manhill, fulfilling the challenge Shantus set for her.

Because Lya doesn't have anyone among her crew with sufficient mind control magic, she has to wait a few days for the Obscurati to round up a reclusive purple-skinned enchantress from the Malice Lands, named Jacale. But by the end of Day 3 of the challenge, unless the party interrupts Lya's plans the orc sea chief will already have attacked Manhill. It will take a day for the news to filter back to Shantus's court, and so the party will have only until dusk on Day 4 to get Cavallo to contact Shantus and pledge loyalty.

The party might act quickly, or they might thwart Lya's plan. They might even decide to still help out Cavallo de Guerra once Lya has already won, just to get the orc warlord on their side. But if they fail, the blatant unfairness of Lya's tactics impresses Zarkava Ssa'litt, who will be tempted to vote for the tiefling.

present at any of the party's interactions with Cavallo. She tries to counter their arguments, to make them think they're competing for de Guerra's support. In truth, she's just stalling for time.

Specific Interests.

The party can get de Guerra's attention by offering Risuri ironclad ships, or at least steam engines. Cavallo knows about the Bruse's new pet gnome, and rumor is that he's busy designing a new shipyard – no one will say where, though. Cavallo wants to make sure he's not weakened by this development.

A particular boon he desires is to have the Risuri archfey of the sea, Beshela, grant her blessing to his ships – both military and merchant. He'll gladly arrange the appropriate offerings to keep her favor, since normally only a few safe sea lanes are available near the Risuri border. With Beshela's blessing, his ships could take faster routes without fear of attack by merfey and sea monsters.

Both those two the party could potentially wrangle with a few quick *sendings*. More difficult is convincing Shantus that Cavallo's daughter Corta Nariz should succeed him as Bruse. The amount of horse-trading required to pull it off is probably beyond the scope of this adventure, but this is one of those possibilities that players might manage if they have a crazy brilliant idea.



Gunsmithery.

Though Cavallo's an old-fashioned warlord, he appreciates a good weapon, even something newfangled like a firearm. He'll want to see the guns of any gunsmith in the party and segue into asking whether Risur could help set up factories in his region to produce arms and ammunition. While a PC might not have the connections for that, a simple way to get on the man's good side would be to give him a gun as a gift.

Getting Him to Like You.

Cavallo explicitly states that he owes the party nothing. While yes he'd appreciate the aforementioned deals, there's no time pressure on him. He then suggests they might help him kill the "dangerous" goblins (see Bug Hunt, page 18); his best people are all naval-oriented, and hunting vermin in the mountains is beneath them.

The party might accept, or might offer to help young ill Altioro (see Masters of Public Health, page 16). And while it isn't enough to make a huge difference, the party can earn some good will if they can impress Alonsa Frolián in battle (see below).

Hostage Letter.

After bringing up the issue of the goblins, Cavallo sends a servant, who returns with a greasy, wrinkled letter. The note arrived a few days earlier from, as de Guerra puts it, "a foreign hostage being held by the goblins." This is **Player's Handout – Hostage Letter**.

The letter is signed as "Dr. Elias Malapropism," a pseudonym being used by **Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen**, whom the party may have met in Adventure Two, *The Dying Skyseer*.

Bear Battle.

If a PC challenges Alonsa, she'll pit her dire bear in a fight against that PC's pet. First she'll want to see how the animal does against a lesser foe, and she'll summon a creature for it to fight in the pit. She offers the group some time to tend to any wounds on the pet, and then she's ready for the main match. Alternately, if no one in the party has an animal companion or the like, she'll let a PC enter the pit blindfolded, unarmed, and unarmored.

The castle staff gathers to watch the spectacle. Perceptive PCs that make a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check notice that while Alonsa is focusing on her bear, Cavallo looks weaker.

Terrain.

The pit is an obstacle course for Large creatures, and so stretches 100 feet on a side, and is 20 feet deep with ramps accessible by gates. The walls are lined with inward-facing spikes. A creature forced into a wall takes 1d6 piercing damage.

A 10-foot wide moat cuts the pit in two. It can be crossed by a narrow bridge with a successful DC 17 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (for a Large creature to balance), or by a 10-foot long wood-and-leather tunnel. Medium creatures can move through the tunnel normally, but a Large creature must squeeze with a DC 18 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (or become stuck in the middle). The pit can also be jumped by making a DC 8 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check and a running start, or swum across and climbed out of with a DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check.

A few other obstacles dot the area, like foliage for difficult terrain and concealment, and iron fences that creatures can swipe their claws through (counts as half cover) but cannot move through.

Monster Fight.

The first foe is a hoard spirit (see next page for stats), a kind of elemental being that dragons would use to animate their treasure and protect it from thieves. Without a treasure handy, it simply resembles a skinless giant vulture with veins of fire and bones of marble. It tries to smash the PC's pet into the spikes. Alonsa can keep it summoned for up to 5 minutes.

Using magic or similar powers to enhance one's pet is allowed, but not to attack the other pet.

Cock Fight.

The second foe is Alonsa's dire bear, Chupacabra (see next page for stats). But for this battle, the goal is more complex than simply fighting each other. In addition to the two combatants, Cavallo's staff also release six roosters. The roosters run all over the place, trying to stay away from the battling creatures. Neither animal is allowed to attack the other until it has captured or killed at least 2 roosters. A rooster has AC 14 and 1 hit point.

If anyone complains about animal cruelty, Cavallo says that in his father's day they used to play this game with humans.

During the fight, Alonsa uses her magic to enhance Chupacabra, first with *longstrider* but then with *bear's endurance*. She has to touch her companion, though, so she has to move around the edge of the pit or order her bear closer.



Hoard Spirit

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 60 (8d10+16)

Speed 20 ft., burrow 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws DEX +2, CON +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +3

Damage Vulnerabilities cold

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Ignan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Earth Glide. The hoard spirit can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the hoard spirit doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Fire Form. The hoard spirit can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. A creature that touches the hoard spirit or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage. In addition, the hoard spirit can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. The first time it enters a creature's space on a turn, that creature takes 5 (1d10) fire damage and catches fire; until someone takes an action to douse the fire, the creature takes 5 (1d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

Keen Senses. The hoard spirit has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Power Attack. When the hoard spirit makes its first melee weapon attack in a turn, it can choose to take a -5 penalty to its melee weapon attack rolls in exchange for a +10 bonus to melee weapon damage. In addition, the hoard spirit can use a bonus action to make one melee weapon attack after it uses a melee weapon to reduce a creature to 0 hit points or score a critical hit with it. The hoard spirit can only use this feature on its turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hoard spirit attacks twice.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4) bludgeoning damage plus 5 (1d10) fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it ignites. Until a creature takes an action to douse the fire, the target takes 5 (1d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

Molten Puddle (1/Day). As an action, the hoard spirit can vomit forth a puddle of molten rock or metal that fills its space (10-foot square) to a depth of 2–3 inches and counts as difficult terrain. Any creature that moves through this puddle of lava takes 7 (2d6) fire damage. This damage continues for 1d3 rounds after the creature leaves the lava pool, although then it only inflicts 1d6 points of fire damage at the end of the creature's turn. The molten puddle solidifies and is safe to touch after 1 minute. At the GM's discretion, this puddle could start secondary fires.

Chupacabra (Dire Bear)

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 115 (10d12+50)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws DEX +4

Skills Athletics +10, Perception +9

Senses passive Perception 19

Languages —

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Keen Smell. The bear has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The bear makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) slashing damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 17).

Aftermath.

Winning the monster duel impresses Alonsa, which earns the party Cavallo's grudging respect. He'll give them a little leeway on any odd requests they have, and will generally assume they're well-intentioned, rather than acting on orders from Shantus to cause him trouble. If the party fails or doesn't try this fight (or at least some way to earn the old orc's respect), Cavallo will try to keep the party from talking to his grandson, and he'll be more inclined to listen to Lya's suggestions to make the party's life difficult.

Masters of Public Health

Puzzle. Montage. Level 9.

The party seeks the source of a disease afflicting Citado Cavallo.

A parasite known as the "dragon worm" has infected Cavallo's grandson Altioro, of a type highly resistant to simple magic cures. The dragon worm occasionally flares up in remote villages, but recently it has afflicted people in poor districts of Citado Cavallo. Public opinion views it as a physical manifestation of impurity and villainy, since it is most common among the goblin tribes who were allied with the region's long-dead dragon tyrant Furioso. It would discredit Cavallo's daughter Corta Nariz if the public learned her son was "impure."

The true source of the infection is a public bath house. The nearby volcanic caldera Lago Fuego has long supplied the city with slightly sulfurous waters, but it was rumored that the late dragon tyrant's hoard lay beneath its waters. Cavallo de Guerra had it pumped and drained to find the treasure, and when that failed he expanded his search to other stagnant pools in the pock-marked mountainside. All these waters were shunted into the aqueduct that feeds the city, and though indeed the treasure was found, the pool that contained it was infested with dragon worm eggs.

Only a handful of people, mostly children who see no problem



with drinking from bathwater, caught the worm from the bathhouses, but as the water trickled down to poorer neighborhoods it made its way to wells and shared cisterns, and now the city has a small epidemic.

Unlike real-world guinea worm, dragon worm can enter a victim's system and burrow through the body in a matter of days, and once it lays its eggs it traces a new thread across the body as it eats its way toward different exit points.

Investigating the Disease.

With a DC 17 Wisdom (Medicine) check the party is familiar with the disease profile of dragon worm, giving them the clue that they should check water sources. By examining an extracted specimen with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check the PCs can realize the growth and movement rate of the worm, and with a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check learn that this particular strain is infused with elemental fire energy. Even closer study with a superb DC 25 Intelligence (Arcana) check matches the energy specifically to the magic that grants dragons their might and resilience.

Asking around in poorer neighborhoods with a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check can find people willing to admit locations where people have caught the worm, though Altioro never went to any of these places. Careful inquiries made with a DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) check learn that a few other wealthy families also secretly have children suffering from dragon worm. Their children generally don't socialize, but they know each other from a particular high-society bath house.

If the party knows the worm's growth rate, with a DC 25 Wisdom (Medicine) check it's possible after surveying a few dozen people with the affliction to determine when the parasite was introduced to the water system; the last week of Spring. Even a cursory search for likely associated events at that time turns up the pumping of one of the flooded pits near Lago Fuego.

Goblins of Lago Fuego.

Cavallo de Guerra drove the goblins away so he could look for dragon treasure, but locals can note the interesting fact that the goblins, who have suffered from dragon worm as long as anyone can remember, don't seem to have it anymore. If the party tracks down the goblins (see Bug Hunt, page 18), they might learn that the tribe spoke of a human shaman who helped drive the worms from their bodies.

Return of the Good Doctor.

The party likely helped save Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen from the clutches of the Obscurati. A brilliant surgeon who melds magic and medicine, von Recklinghausen fled his home in the Malice Lands to avoid his creation Andrei (see Adventure Four, *Always on Time*), whom he cobbled together from dead body parts and returned to life. After the party rescued him, he eventually found his way to Ber, wandering for a few months before finding the poor Fuego goblin tribe who all needed treatment for dragon worm.

If the party goes to the Fuego tribe, they might meet Dr. von Recklinghausen and enlist his aid in helping the orcs of Citado Cavallo. In the process, they might spare the goblins from a slaughter, if they're up for it.

Real World Guinea Worm.

In the real world, dracunculiasis—literally “affliction with little dragons,” caused by the “guinea worm”—has vexed humanity since prehistory, though today it is endemic only to four countries in Africa.

When a person drinks contaminated water, eggs hatch into the worms, which slowly burrow through the victim's body over the course of weeks or months. They usually head downward toward feet, but can emerge anywhere, including eyes. The emergence of the worm burns like fire, and victims seek relief by placing the injured body part in water. The worm ejects eggs into the water, continuing its life cycle.

The worm can be removed by carefully wrapping its end around a stick and methodically twisting the stick to pull the worm out. This must be done over the course of days to prevent the worm from snapping and decomposing inside the victim's body. Even when properly treated, the pain prevents many people from attending school or work.

Eradication efforts rely on training people to soothe their injuries in buckets of water which can be disposed of away from drinking sources, and to filter water taken from possibly infested pools. Thanks to efforts spearheaded by the Carter Center, guinea worm is likely to soon be the third completely eradicated infectious disease (after smallpox and rinderpest), and the first completely eradicated parasitic disease.

Devising a Cure.

While it's possible to extract the worm the traditional way, magical cures are ineffective and in any case don't prevent the parasite from spreading. Dr. von Recklinghausen can share his cure if the party finds him. Otherwise, if your party is scientifically inclined they can try to research a custom spell to deal with the parasite.

This research requires three successful skill checks—Intelligence (Arcana), Wisdom (Medicine), and Intelligence (Nature) all against DC 26—each of which requires an adventurer to spend 8 hours working. Different PCs can make each check and collaborate on the results. If the party has access to a proper medical laboratory (we don't know what your PCs have stashed on their boat) they gain a +5 bonus to these checks.

Casting Out Wyrms.

The dragon worms are infused with fire energy, and seek to lay their eggs in water. Treatment requires multiple pebbles taken from a fast-moving stream bed, and a simple box containing one gold coin, in addition to a *remove disease* spell. Without these special components the spell fails.



Wolfgang von Recklinghausen.

A distinguished, intelligent, and poised gentleman in his late 30s, Dr. von Recklinghausen speaks elegantly with a hard-to-place accent. He appears fairly innocuous, though his sharply-groomed goatee and the rapier at his hip give him a hint of menace.

After years of intense study and experimentation, with his marriage in tatters and his fortune nearly depleted, Wolfgang finally achieved his goal of combining medical knowledge with sorcery in order to restore a corpse to life. His creation drove him from his home, and Wolfgang has been running or hiding since then, not aware that his “son” has given up his quest for revenge (see Adventure Four, *Always on Time*).



The patient has to swallow one pebble, and while the spell is cast, the other pebbles are run along the patient's skin. When they pass over the tip of the worm they hum and cause the worm to burrow rapidly and painfully to the surface. But then the worm is drawn into the pebble, which must be quickly placed into the box with the coin. Once all the worms are removed from the victim's body, the coin can be removed from the box, which is then sealed and can be disposed of. Wolfgang burned the case to impress the goblins, but the worms are harmless and petrified.

Avoiding Reinfection.

The hard part is keeping people from reinfecting themselves with contaminated water. While the mundane "don't drink water that isn't clean" works eventually – the eggs can only survive outside a humanoid host for about a year – the worm is only resistant to magic while inside a host. A body of water can be cleansed with *purify food and drink* (using multiple applications if necessary), and then all that is necessary is to remind anyone who manages to get infected not to dip their worm wounds in the water.

Bug Hunt

Action/Social. Montage. Level 10+.

The Fuego tribe of goblins has a small army of bugs under their control.

This section of the adventure is a bit optional, and so we just provide general details of the goblins, plus offer a few possible permutations of monster and goblin foes.

The Fuego tribe once served the dragon tyrant Furioso, and after his death they settled near his abandoned lair – a flooded caldera surrounded by dozens of old flooded lava tubes. Cavallo de Guerra booted the tribe off their lands a few months ago and started draining the tubes until he finally found the dragon's hoard.

A goblin shaman named Willigu led his people into the wild mountains thirty miles from Citado Cavallo. There they lost many of their tribe to monstrous attacks until Willigu discovered the magic that would let him control these beasts (i.e., he tore the head off a dead queen ant and put it on a pike). Bitter at the orcs, Willigu directed his tribe to capture and train as many giant insects as they could.

During this time they were found by Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen, who had heard of their pervasive dragon worm affliction. Wolfgang doesn't speak the goblin's language, but he's figured out that the tribe has been attacking the outskirts of orcish territory. Willigu fears the doctor will lead the orcs back to him, so he's had his warriors detain Wolfgang whenever he's made moves to leave.

OUTER PATROL (LEVEL 10).

- 8 Fuego Tribe warriors mounted on giant bombardier beetles
- 2 fiery ankhegs

INNER DEFENSES (LEVEL 10).

- 24 Fuego Tribe goblins
- 4 fiery ankhegs
- 15 giant ant swarms

FINAL STAND (LEVEL 12).

- Willigu, Fuego Tribe shaman (has an ant-queen head on a stick)
- 2 Fuego Tribe warriors mounted on giant bombardier beetles
- 1 cyttillipede
- 24 giant ant swarms

NONCOMBATANTS.

- Approximately 100 children and elderly goblins
- Dr. Wolfgang von Recklinghausen

Willigu, Fuego Tribe Shaman

Small humanoid (goblin), neutral druid 9

Armor Class 18 (+1 leather, shield)

Hit Points 86 (gd8+45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)

Saving Throws INT +6, WIS +5

Skills Acrobatics +8, Nature +5, Perception +7, Stealth +8, Survival +7

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Druidic, Goblin, Orc

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Extra Magic. Instead of a druid circle, Willigu knows an additional cantrip and can prepare a number of additional spells each day equal to his proficiency bonus.

Feat: War Magic. Willigu has advantage when he is concentrating on a spell and has to make a Constitution saving throw from taking damage, he can wield weapons or a shield in both hands and still make somatic components for spellcasting, and can use his reaction to cast a spell (maximum casting time: 1 action) at a creature that provokes an opportunity attack from him.

Nimble Escape. Willigu can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of his turns.

Spellcasting. Willigu is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells prepared from the druid's spell list:

- Cantrips (at will):** *mending, produce flame, resistance, shillelagh*
- 1st level (4 slots):** *animal friendship, cure wounds, detect poison and disease, thunderwave*
- 2nd level (3 slots):** *flaming sphere, heat metal, spike growth*
- 3rd level (3 slots):** *call lightning, protection from energy*
- 4th level (3 slots):** *giant insect, wall of fire*
- 5th level (1 slot):** *stoneskin*

Wild Shape (2/Short Rest). Willigu can use his action to magically assume the shape of a beast that he has seen before that has a maximum CR of 1. He can stay in a beast shape for 4 hours. Willigu then reverts to his normal form unless he expends another use of this feature. He can revert to his normal form earlier by using a bonus action on his turn. Willigu automatically reverts if he falls unconscious, drop to 0 hit points, or dies. While Willigu is transformed, the following rules apply:

- + Willigu's game statistics are replaced by the statistics of the beast, but he retains his alignment, personality, and Intelligence, Wisdom,



and Charisma scores. Willigu also retains all of his skill and saving throw proficiencies, in addition to gaining those of the creature. If the creature has the same proficiency as Willigu and the bonus in its stat block is higher than his, use the creature's bonus instead of his. If the creature has any legendary or lair actions, Willigu can't use them.

- When Willigu transforms, he assumes the beast's hit points and Hit Dice. When he reverts to his normal form, Willigu returns to the number of hit points he had before he transformed. However, if he reverts as a result of dropping to 0 hit points, any excess damage carries over to his normal form.
- Willigu can't cast spells, and his ability to speak or take any action that requires hands is limited to the capabilities of his beast form. Transforming doesn't break Willigu's concentration on a spell he's already cast, however, or prevent him from taking actions that are part of a spell, such as *call lightning*, that he's already cast.
- Willigu retains the benefit of any features from his class, race, or other source and can use them if the new form is physically capable of doing so. However, he can't use any of his special senses, such as darkvision, unless the new form also has that sense.
- Willigu chooses whether his equipment falls to the ground in his space, merges into his new form, or is worn by it. Worn equipment functions as normal, but the GM decides whether it is practical for the new form to wear a piece of equipment, based on the creature's shape and size. Willigu's equipment doesn't change size or shape to match the new form, and any equipment that the new form can't wear must either fall to the ground or merge with it. Equipment that merges with the form has no effect until he leaves the form.

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 (+7 with *shillelagh*) to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6-1) bludgeoning damage or 8 (1d8+4) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

Sling (10 bullets). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4+4) bludgeoning damage.

EQUIPMENT

Possessions. Willigu carries a *potion of greater healing*, diamond dust worth 250 gp, and the head of an ant queen mounted on a stick.

Giant Ant Swarmer

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (3d8+9)

Speed 50 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	1 (-5)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +5, Survival +5

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Keen Smell. The giant ant swarmer has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Fiery Ankheg

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor), 13 while prone

Hit Points 51 (6d10+18)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	1 (-5)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +5

Damage Vulnerabilities cold

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6+3) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) acid damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the ankheg can bite only the grappled creature and has advantage on attack rolls to do so.

Acid Spray (Recharge 6). The ankheg spits acid in a line that is 30 feet long and 5 feet wide, provided that it has no creature grappled. Each creature in that line must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Cytilipede

Large beast, neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d10+32)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)

Saving Throws DEX +4, CON +7

Skills Athletics +8, Perception +6

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage and the target makes a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, for the next minute or until the poison damage is healed the target takes a -2 penalty to AC and Dexterity saving throws, and it can't use reactions.

Cytillesh Flash (1/Day). The cytilipede can cause the cytillesh patches that grow along its body to release a bright flash of blue light that provides bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light in a 40-foot radius. All creatures within the area must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature in bright light is stunned for 1d4 rounds and a creature in dim light is confused (as the spell *confusion*) until the end of the cytilipede's next turn.





Fuego Tribe Warrior

Small humanoid (goblin), neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 36 (8d6+8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws CON +3

Skills Animal Handling +3, Insight +3, Perception +3, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Goblin

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Feat: Mounted Combat. When the Fuego Tribe warrior's mount is attacked, it can make itself the target of that attack. In addition, the Fuego tribe warrior has advantage on melee attack rolls when its target is an unmounted creature smaller than its mount. Finally, when the Fuego Tribe warrior's mount is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Nimble Escape. The Fuego Tribe warrior can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

ACTIONS

Spear (2). *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage or 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage if wielded with two hands.

Tanglefoot Bag (2). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target becomes covered in hardening sap and must succeed a DC 10 Strength check or gain the grappled condition. At the start of each of its turns, the target receives another check to remove the grappled condition. The sap can also be destroyed (AC 13, 6 hp).

Giant Bombardier Beetle

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 19 (3d8+6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage.

Acid Spray (Recharge 5–6). The beetle spits acid in a 10-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Fuego Tribe Goblin

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (leather armor, shield)

Hit Points 9 (2d6+2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	6 (-2)

Skills Animal Handling +1, Athletics +2, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Goblin

Challenge ¼ (50 XP)

Nimble Escape. The Fuego Tribe goblin can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Quick. The Fuego Tribe goblin has advantage on initiative.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortbow (10 arrows). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Encountering the Tribe.

Tracking them back from any of their various attacks is fairly easy. They now reside in a stretch of caves in a horse-shoe shaped valley, where the tunnels wind and intersect from many directions so warriors can flee or reinforce each other with ease.

If approached openly they'll talk to non-orcs. Sneaking up requires passing one or two outer patrols. The main tunnel entrances have a few scattered guards who'll respond to the sounds of trouble. Then further back is a defensive bastion, a cave piled with giant insect carcasses to use as a chokepoint. Here Willigu and his pet cytillipede can put up a last line of defense before the living chambers. Magical totems in this cave protect the goblins from the cytillipede's cytillesh flash attack, rendering them immune to its effects. Dr. von Recklinghausen has limited free roam in the caves, but is always escorted if he goes outside.

In a fight, the goblins scatter and attack from surprising directions if possible, while the insects typically just swarm. They think Willigu is their queen, but if his ant-queen-head staff is destroyed, the insects panic and flee, attacking anyone that gets in their way.

Negotiation.

The happiest solution might be to convince the goblins to let Wolfgang go so he can treat Cavallo's grandson, earning the tribe enough good will that Cavallo won't want to destroy them. The goblins could make a living trading the hides and acid of the various giant insects, and occasionally using the burrowing critters to help with excavation and plowing.

Cavallo might even be convinced to give them their lands back, now that he has the dragon's treasure hoard. But he'll want the goblins civilized and brought into the revolution that Bruse Vair-day started. If the party's going to get him to accept the goblins, they'll need to make Willigu presentable, perhaps with some sort of extreme shaman makeover.

**Obscurati Complication.**

While Lya Jierre doesn't care about the goblins, if she learns about the presence of Dr. von Recklinghausen, she might try to abduct him. The Obscurati leadership have acquired his creation, Andrei von Recklinghausen, and they're fascinated with the good doctor's work. Lya won't go out of her way or risk a fight with the party, but she tries to get Wolfgang alone by mentioning his creation, then suggesting they talk more in private, over a meal away from Cavallo.

Tiefling Trickery

Action/Social. Montage. Level 9.

The party might have a chance to stop Lya's hired enchantress.

The purple-skinned enchantress Jacale teleports to Citado Cavallo on Day 2 of the Bruse's challenge. By this point she has already performed various divinations on Commodore Thrag Vidalia, and when she arrives she rents a horse and hires a guide to take her to the naval yard.

She locates Thrag and presents him with a forged and enchanted letter, allegedly from Cavallo's wife, which purports that she is a friend. The letter goes on to say that Jacale has an interest in ships and would like to take a ride aboard Commodore Vidalia's vessel, a light frigate named *Bonita Cheryce*. Thrag makes his ship ready to depart at first light, intending to sail to the mouth of Marrajado de Oro and back.

At the dawn of Day 3, Jacale boards the frigate and it sets out for a casual day cruise. Shortly thereafter, Lya Jierre departs from Cavallo's castle, boards her own ship *Lux Profectusque*, and departs with haste.

False Memories.

About two hours later, Jacale and Thrag take brunch in his suite, and she pours an elixir into his glass, causing him to fall under her command. She tells him that once she leaves, he will remember that she tried to kill him. He even lets her inflict a small gash into his back, nothing life-threatening, but enough to sell the story. He'll remember being paralyzed by poison, only able to watch as Jacale cast a spell and taunted him. This false Jacale claimed that with him dead, Risur will be able to strike. Then, in his false memory, he fought free of the poison and killed her.

Jacale opens a *bag of holding* and produces a dead body that has been altered to resemble her. She has Thrag deliver what would be a killing blow to that corpse, then tells him that he must attack Risur before they can strike. Then she uses a teleportation spell to flee, leaving Thrag convinced he narrowly escaped assassination. He immediately leads his crew on an assault against the fortress at Manhill, on the Risuri shore of Marrajado de Oro.

Returns the Raider.

Thrag launches a cannon bombardment of the fort at two in the afternoon, then sends a small landing force to raze parts of the town outside the fort. The orc raiders hustle back to *Bonita Cheryce* and sail off before the Risuri are able to mount an effective counter-attack.

Thrag returns to Citado Cavallo an hour before dusk, and he sails in boldly with the fake Jacale's body lashed to his ship like a figurehead. He orders everyone to spread the word that he struck Risur before they could attack first. But he warns them to be ready, because he didn't see the Risuri fleet at Manhill, so they might already be on their way.

Within an hour Thrag is summoned to the castle, where Cavallo strips him of his command. Cavallo assumes Thrag was just looking to get revenge for his old grudge, but magical examinations might detect a faint enchantment still upon him. If the false memories are dispelled, he realizes he was tricked. The body, similarly, was transmuted, and that would show up if checked.

Thwarting the Plot.

If the party gets wind of Jacale's plan, she's not threatening in a fight, since all of her magic relies on potions, elixirs, and rituals, rather than spells fast enough to use in combat.

Lya tries to focus the party's attention on her, and since she won't ever meet Jacale, the party's best chance to learn about the plot was to have eavesdropped back at the Bruse's summer court. Divinations might help, and if the party asks in the right places – at the naval yard, at the teleportation beacon – people definitely remember the purple-skinned woman. But they still only have a small window, from the afternoon of Day 2 to dawn on Day 3.

When Commodore Thrag's ship departs, the party – whose rooms look out over the sea – might notice. If they bring it up, no one at the castle knows about it, which might raise a red flag. The party has about eight hours to catch up with Thrag and stop him.

Return to the Court

Social. Real-Time. Level 10.

Bruse Shantus determines who gets to talk to Tinker first.

Upon completion of the Cantabrilla Railroad Challenge, news reaches Bruse Shantus, who has Zarkava *send* to the party and Lya, summoning them back to his summer court. When both groups arrive he throws a banquet for them, and tells them that Tinker will be arriving within an hour to speak with the winning group. Elite orc and lizardfolk court guards watch over the meal to make sure no one attempts anything violent.

The constables that make a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check notice that Kenna Vigilante is only making a token effort to eat. If asked, she lies and says she's feeling ill.

Shantus promises not to stake any further claim to the gnome, so the winning team is free to do as they please. He intends to tell Tinker that two groups want to speak to him, so he leaves it to the winning team to be convincing enough that Tinker won't want to hear the other side. Of course, it won't surprise the Bruse if the winners just try to abduct the gnome.

He gives one final warning, though, that he won't abide any fighting at his court. He'll have Zarkava prepare a teleportation spell to the winners' destination of choice (likely Flint for the PCs, Vendricce for Lya). He cannot abide sore losers.

Then he, Zarkava Ssa'litt, and Kenna Vigilante cast their votes, and Shantus announces who is the winner.



Why Assassinate the Bruse?

If the party and the Obscurati hadn't come to take Tinker away, Pemberton would have been able to build up his army of war machines for another six months, at which point he'd confidently be able to conquer Ber. But he knew attention on Tinker would inevitably reveal the existence of duplicants, so Pemberton is making the best of a bad situation by trying to decapitate the nation.

If he succeeds, it will take longer for the new ruler (likely Cavallo) to mount a counter-attack against him at Isla dolas Focas, Ber won't be quite as friendly to Risur, and Pemberton will have more mechanical defenders for his island, but it doesn't change the challenges the party face unless they decide to join the Beran marines in besieging a city.

Tinker's Approach.

Tinker's simulacrum, still shielded by the Bruse's favor, has been alerted via *sending* to prepare to teleport to the summer court. The nearest arrival teleportation beacon is at a nearby military base, which houses over two thousand soldiers. After the banquet finishes, Zarkava uses *sending* again to tell Tinker to take the teleportation beacon. Ten minutes later he's at the military base, where twenty soldiers escort him.

All of these soldiers are duplicants, seeded at the military base over the past months by Pemberton. The base commander himself has been replaced by a duplicant, as have numerous members of the artillery brigade. Pemberton has long planned to kill the Bruse, but Tinker's arrival seems the perfect opportunity to know exactly when to strike.

In the court itself, 5 elite guards have been replaced by duplicants, as has Kenna Vigilante.

The soldier escort reaches the Summer Court (using the main entrance, not the labyrinth), and they march the jittery Tinker upstairs to the Bruse's throne room, which has a balcony that leads to the bleachers that overlook the labyrinth.

The losing team is asked to remain in the lobby outside the throne room, watched by the 22 escort duplicants. The winning team meets Tinker in the throne room, while Shantus, Zarkava, Kenna, and the 5 court guards look on.

Meeting Oddeog.

Shantus makes brief introductions, and then sends Zarkava away to prepare transportation for whoever convinces the gnome to go with them. He then offers the winning team a bit of privacy by stepping away to the balcony, where he can look down at his labyrinth. Kenna Vigilante stands with him.

Tinker assumes the Ob have come to kill him, but he might remember the PCs from when he briefly crossed their path at the Cauldron Hill facility in Adventure Five, *Cauldron-Born*. If he recalls the group, he listens to their pitch, then gets nervous and apologetic, saying that he doesn't have a choice in what happens next. If, though, he's speaking with the Ob or thinks the party is a threat, he parades around the room boasting that he's glad they showed up, because he is tired of being small and cowering.

Tinker calls for Bruse Shantus, and when the minotaur comes over the gnome announces that he's refusing to go, wants everyone else to leave, and will give them to the count of – and he pulls

out a pocket watch – sixteen. He starts counting upward from zero, and at the count of ten the party might hear (DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check) the characteristic whistling of an incoming artillery shell.

Coup ex Machina

Action. Tactical. Level 15.

An overwhelming force targets the Bruse. Will the party help save him?

Roll initiative. Tinker acts at 16.

On Tinker's turn, he pokes himself on his chest with an audible click. A panel pops open, revealing him to be hollow and made of metal, and he reaches in, producing a comical black bomb. As he pulls it out, the fuse lights, and Tinker grins and giggles as it burns down to an imminent explosion.

Getting the bomb away from Tinker likely requires an adventurer to make a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. At the start of Tinker's next turn, the bomb explodes, dealing 35 (10d6) bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage in a 50-foot radius (a successful DC 17 Dexterity saving throw halves this damage). Any creature adjacent to the bomb takes double damage.

The blast annihilates Tinker's duplicant body unless the party knocks it away from him. In any event, he'll soon thereafter sever his connection to this duplicant.

Artillery and Breach.

Immediately after Tinker's bomb explodes, the building shakes as an artillery shell strikes the roof. Walls crack, bits of the ceiling collapse, and eye-searing yellow smoke fills the air. This is Agony Gas, a chemical weapon that sears mucous membranes and can cause debilitating pain and blindness.

At that moment, the court guards – actually duplicant terminators – spring into action. Two open the doors to the room, providing access for the 20 soldiers outside – duplicant swarms. Kenna Vigilante, also a duplicant, knocks the Bruse down and focuses on killing him first.

To the Rescue.

If the party won the challenge and got to meet with Tinker, Lya and her bodyguards are stuck in the outer room with the duplicant soldiers. Lya's group will aid in the destruction of the duplicants, and they try to protect the Bruse.

If the party was stuck outside, the situation might be reversed, though they might not want to get involved in a fight. If they sit on their hands long enough, Lya orders the Bruse to come with them, and they leap over the balcony into the labyrinth.

Glauca Evora, Zarkava Ssa'litt, and any other defenders at the court are too far away to arrive in time to make a difference in the battle.

Late Reinforcements.

The gnoll Pardo is not present for the initial attack, but he's on the court grounds. Have him appear after four or five rounds, perhaps



intercepting the party if they're trying to get the Bruse to safety. If it's safe he'll target Shantus, but if challenged he focuses on enemies with ranged attack options, separating himself from melee foes with *wall of fire*.

HOSTILE FORCES

- 20 duplicant swarms
- 5 duplicant terminators
- Pardo duplicant
- Kenna Vigilante duplicant
- 1 agony gas hazard

POTENTIAL ALLIES

(See Appendices One and Two for statistics.)

- Bruse Shantus
- Lya Jierre
- Merton Goncala
- Rush Munchausen

Duplicant Swarmer

Medium humanoid (duplicant half-orc), neutral

Armor Class 17 (breastplate, shield)

Hit Points 39 (6d8+12)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws DEX +2, CON +4, CHA +1

Skills Intimidation +3

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities disease, exhaustion, sleep

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blindsense. If the duplicant is able to hear, it is aware of the location of any hidden or invisible creature within 30 feet of it.

Constructed. The duplicant's constructed nature gives it advantage on saving throws against mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, and the stunned condition.

Metal Shell. The duplicant has a hard metallic exoskeleton that protects it from harm, but when badly damaged it cracks open to reveal the creature's sensitive inner machinery. When reduced to half its hit points or less, the duplicant loses its damage resistances to weapon damage and takes a -2 penalty to both its AC and saving throws.

Relentless Endurance (1/Long Rest). When the duplicant is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, it can drop to 1 hit point instead.

Savage Attacks. When the duplicant scores a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, it can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

ACTIONS

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 9 (1d8+5) slashing damage or 10 (1d10+5) slashing damage if wielded in two hands.

Musket. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 40/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d12+1) piercing damage.

Duplicant Terminator

Medium humanoid (duplicant half-orc), neutral

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 90 (12d8+36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws DEX +3, CON +6, CHA +2

Skills Intimidation +4

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities disease, exhaustion, sleep

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Blindsense. If the duplicant is able to hear, it is aware of the location of any hidden or invisible creature within 30 feet of it.

Constructed. The duplicant's constructed nature gives it advantage on saving throws against mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, and the stunned condition.

Feat: Grappler. The duplicant has advantage on attack rolls against a creature it is grappling and it can use an action to try to pin a creature it's grappled. To do so, the duplicant makes another grapple check. If it succeeds, the duplicant and the creature are both restrained until the grapple ends.

Fighting Style: Archery. The duplicant has a +2 bonus on ranged attack rolls (included in its statistics).

Metal Shell. The duplicant has a hard metallic exoskeleton that protects it from harm, but when badly damaged it cracks open to reveal the creature's sensitive inner machinery. When reduced to half its hit points or less, the duplicant loses its damage resistances to weapon damage and takes a -2 penalty to both its AC and saving throws.

Power Attack. When the duplicant makes its first melee weapon attack in a turn, it can choose to take a -5 penalty to its melee weapon attack rolls in exchange for a +10 bonus to melee weapon damage. In addition, the duplicant can use a bonus action to make one melee weapon attack after it uses a melee weapon to reduce a creature to 0 hit points or score a critical hit with it. The duplicant can only use this feature on its turn.

Relentless Endurance (1/Long Rest). When the duplicant is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, it can drop to 1 hit point instead.

Savage Attacks. When the duplicant scores a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, it can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The duplicant makes two melee attacks.

Unarmed. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4+5) bludgeoning damage and the duplicant can use a bonus action to grapple the target with a successful Strength (Athletics) check opposed by the target's Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

Bayonet. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) piercing damage.

Musket. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 40/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d12+2) piercing damage.



Pardo Duplicant

Medium humanoid (duplicant groll), neutral evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 90 (12d8+36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws DEX +3, CON +7, WIS +6

Skills Deception +12, History +8, Intimidation +8, Persuasion +8

Damage Resistances fire; bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities disease, exhaustion, sleep

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Draconic, Groll

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Blindsense. If the duplicant is able to hear, it is aware of the location of any hidden or invisible creature within 30 feet of it.

Burning Magic. When a creature fails a saving throw and takes fire damage from one of the duplicant's spells, that creature catches on fire. The fire lasts 1d4 rounds, dealing 1 fire damage per spell level. The creature can spend an action and make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to put out the flames.

Constructed. The duplicant's constructed nature gives it advantage on saving throws against mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, and the stunned condition.

Feat: War Magic. The duplicant has advantage when it is concentrating on a spell and has to make a Constitution saving throw from taking damage; it can wield weapons (or a shield) in both hands and still make somatic components for spellcasting; and it can use its reaction to cast a spell (maximum casting time: 1 action) at a creature that provokes an opportunity attack from it.

Metal Shell. The duplicant has a hard metallic exoskeleton that protects it from harm, but when badly damaged it cracks open to reveal the creature's sensitive inner machinery. When reduced to half its hit points or less, "Pardo" loses its damage resistances to weapon damage and takes a -2 penalty to both his AC and saving throws.

Savage Attacks. When the duplicant scores a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, it can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

Siege Monster. "Pardo" deals double damage to objects and structures.

Spellcasting. The duplicant is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, mending, resistance, spare the dying*
1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, command, inflict wounds, sanctuary, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *augury, blindness/deafness, hold person, shatter*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball, protection from energy*

4th level (3 slots): *freedom of movement, wall of fire*

5th level (2 slots): *antilife shell, conjure elemental (fire only)*

ACTIONS

Unarmed. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4+4) bludgeoning damage.

Fire Breath (2/Day). The duplicant exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Kenna Vigilante Duplicant

Medium humanoid (duplicant half-dragon), lawful neutral

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 119 (14d8+56)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws DEX +4, CON +8, CHA +6

Skills Intimidation +6, Nature +5, Perception +9, Persuasion +6, Survival +9

Damage Resistances fire; bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities disease, exhaustion, sleep

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Draconic, Giant

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Blindsense. If the duplicant is able to hear, it is aware of the location of any hidden or invisible creature within 30 feet of it.

Constructed. The duplicant's constructed nature gives it advantage on saving throws against mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, and the stunned condition.

Favored Enemy. The duplicant has advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track dragons and gnolls, as well as on Intelligence checks to recall information about them.

Metal Shell. The duplicant has a hard metallic exoskeleton that protects it from harm, but when badly damaged it cracks open to reveal the creature's sensitive inner machinery. When reduced to half its hit points or less, "Kenna" loses its damage resistances to weapon damage and takes a -2 penalty to both its AC and saving throws.

Natural Explorer: Grassland and Mountain. When the duplicant makes an Intelligence or Wisdom check related to the grasslands or mountains, its proficiency bonus (+4) is doubled if it is using a skill that it's proficient in. While traveling for an hour or more in its favored terrain, the duplicant gains the following benefits:

- Difficult terrain doesn't slow its group's travel.
- The duplicant's group can't become lost except by magical means.
- Even when it is engaged in another activity while traveling (such as foraging, navigating, or tracking), the duplicant remains alert to danger.
- If the duplicant is traveling alone, it can move stealthily at a normal pace.
- When it forages, the duplicant finds twice as much food as it normally would.
- While tracking other creatures, the duplicant also learns their exact number, their sizes, and how long ago they passed through the area.

Power Attack. When the duplicant makes its first melee weapon attack in a turn, it can choose to take a -5 penalty to its melee weapon attack rolls in exchange for a +10 bonus to melee weapon damage. In addition, the duplicant can use a bonus action to make one melee weapon attack after it uses a melee weapon to reduce a creature to 0 hit points or score a critical hit with it. The duplicant can only use this feature on its turn.

Spellcasting. The duplicant is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *hunter's mark, longstrider*

2nd level (2 slots): *pass without trace, spike growth*



ACTIONS

Multiattack. The duplicant attacks five times: twice with its bite and three times with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8+6) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6+6) slashing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The duplicant exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Terrain.

The throne room has a balcony that overlooks the labyrinth. The losing team has been made to wait in the lobby outside the throne room with the duplicant swarmer guards. Once the artillery lands, the throne room and lobby are suffused with toxic agony gas, meaning the safest escape route is to flee out onto the balcony and into the labyrinth (see the map in Act One).

Additional shells fall every 2 rounds thereafter, so if the party flees to the labyrinth and you want to keep the confusion high, perhaps a shell strikes there and blinding gas falls upon them.

The thick gas grants half cover to creatures more than 1 square away, and total cover to those more than 2 squares away, but the duplicants all have blindsense. Any living creature that needs to breathe feels its mucous membranes burn. Such creatures take 1d6 acid damage at the beginning of their turns until they exit the area. Creatures that fall unconscious due to this damage are permanently blinded.

Tactics.

This is a deadly combat, balanced by the presence of several possible allies. Taken all together it can be complicated to track all their stats, so we encourage GMs to be prepared.

The duplicant Kenna tries to tear apart the Bruse with her claws and teeth. Two duplicant terminators move to open the doors to the lobby, while the other three attack whoever else is present with the Bruse.

The duplicant swarmer can, if necessary, bash down the door to the throne room. After one round they can crack it, and after a

Duplicant Template.

Any living creature can become a duplicant. It keeps its statistics, except as follows.

- **Challenge.** Recalculate the rating after you apply the template.
- **Armor Class.** The duplicant's armor class increases by 2.
- **Ability Scores.** The duplicant's Strength increases by 4.
- **Senses.** The duplicant gains darkvision 60 feet.
- **Resistances.** The duplicant gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing.
- **Blindsense.** If the duplicant is able to hear, it is aware of the location of any hidden or invisible creature within 30 feet of it.
- **Constructed.** The duplicant's constructed nature gives it advantage on saving throws against mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, and the stunned condition.
- **Metal Shell.** The duplicant has a hard metallic exoskeleton that protects it from harm, but when badly damaged it cracks open to reveal the creature's sensitive inner machinery. When reduced to half its hit points or less, the duplicant loses its damage resistances to weapon damage and takes a –2 penalty to both its AC and saving throws.

second they can break it enough that it merely counts as difficult terrain. Once they have access to the Bruse, they try to overwhelm him. They always try to keep a line one or two deep between the Bruse and any possible allies.

If the group can get out of the labyrinth, they can make a run for the gathered petitioners, who outnumber the duplicants to slow them down and give the Bruse a chance to escape. Ber's ruler is glad to flee rather than fight.

If the fight spills out to the labyrinth, the duplicants pursue, but are unaware of the pit traps. Wherever the fight heads, Lya and her allies try to help protect the Bruse, and Pardo eventually shows up as a final foe.

In the very likely event that the party takes this opportunity to take out Lya Jierre, she fights intelligently, gauging how the odds look before deciding whether to flee. Her *gatecrasher charm* can help her escape, and in a pinch she can cling to Rush's back as he brachiates away through the air. Her preference, though, is to call for a cessation of hostilities since they might need to work together to defeat whoever was behind this attack.





Aftermath.

Should the duplicants overwhelm the party, eventually loyal soldiers from the nearby base will sally forth and defeat them, but the death toll is devastating, and several duplicants escape into the wilderness to wreak later havoc. Petitioners might find dying PCs and stabilize them.

If the Bruse perished, Zarkava takes temporary control, but she immediately uses divinations to assure herself that Cavallo de Guerra was not responsible, then uses a *sending* spell informing de Guerra that he's become the new Bruse.

An examination of Tinker or any of the other duplicants reveals their basic nature: a metal endoskeleton with a metallic shell that takes on the shape of whomever it's bonded to, linked to a small vial of witchoil in the duplicant's chest that holds a piece of the bonded person's soul.

Let the party take the lead on investigating if they want, but if they're unable, Zarkava can provide the necessary divination magic to trace the attack to Isla dolas Focas. The gnolls there have a fleet – sizable enough to defend their shores, if not enough to truly threaten the Beran navy – so reaching the island will be difficult.

Kenna with Clarity.

Once sufficiently injured—or if she has killed the Bruse—Kenna Vigilante manages to break free of the control imposed by the duplicant bond. If the party gives her a chance to switch sides, she'll aid in the fight. Afterward she can briefly report being abducted from the military base a few days earlier. She feels like she's in two places at once, and wherever she is she hears gnolls getting closer, and other voices calling for help, voices of soldiers who were also abducted. Then her body falls down like a ragdoll. The transformation that gave the duplicant her appearance fades, leaving just an inert metal body.

Whoever rules Ber now – Shantus or Cavallo – declares war on the Cult of the Steel God and all who reside on Isla dolas Focas. Within a week a fleet will be readied to assault the island, with a mission to conquer that land, annex it, and seize whatever facility constructed these duplicants before more can be made. Lya Jierre, of course, suggests an alliance: she and the PCs wait until the Beran navy is distracting the gnoll defenders, and then they work together to reach Tinker, with whoever reaches him first having first chance to recruit him.

