Fright on Track

An adventure by My Wife is the MC to building a 5-room dungeon with trains and zombies.

This document is free as part of this year's Dungeon Jam! Watch our video on this homebrew here!

Compatibility

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.2 ("SRD 5.2") by Wizards of the Coast LLC, available at https://www.dndbeyond.com/srd. The SRD 5.2 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode.

Adventure

This document is an adventure that features trains and zombies

Homebrew Material

This adventure builder is homebrew content, created with care and refined through multiple design passes. While it hasn't been through full-scale playtesting, it's built with balance, clarity, and fun in mind. You may still encounter the occasional edge case or moment of friction during play, so feel free to adjust anything to fit your table's needs. Similarly, any names and concepts similar to other official content found in this document are "inspired by" and are in no way representative of the source material. As with all unofficial content, this material isn't legal for D&D Adventurers League or other official events.

End of the Line

End of the Line is a high-tension adventure where the party must reach a haven from the undead horde. Players experience the growing tension of the approaching mass of walking corpses while having to navigate the internal politics of other survivors within The Crawling Cataphract, the only safe space throughout the adventure. While the adventure runs on rails, there are many branching paths that open and close depending on the party's actions and choices.

Document Overview

The following elements help better understand the nature of this document.

Who Am I Talking To?

Whenever I reference "you," I'm referring to the Dungeon Master (you) of the table. This document is intended for Dungeon Masters. Players are discouraged from reading this adventure, although several areas have notes that encourage you to inform your players of certain key details.

Document Organization

The first four chapters contain dedicated tools to properly run this adventure. The encounters, maps, and actual session guidance can be found in **Chapter 5: The Journey**, and references concepts from the preceding chapters. **Open document bookmarks for quick navigation!**

Setting Agnostic

This adventure will feature descriptive terms and avoid proper naming as much as possible to enable DMs to plug this into an ongoing campaign.

Balance

The adventure is intended for a party of 3 to 4 player characters between levels 5 to 8.

Duration

This adventure can take 1 to 2 sessions to complete.

OPTIONAL: Accompanying Character Option

A new subclass option called the **Sealwright** can be introduced to the party as a character option for players with an affinity for tinkering or crafting. This subclass is a curse-afflicted artisan who applies tinkering and technology to keep the malediction at bay, but may ultimately tap into its power in order to survive. Its features are designed to complement this adventure's setting elements and add personal narrative weight, without granting any significant mechanical advantages against this adventure's challenges.

This character option can be found here **[**Ko-Fi**|**Patreon**]**. Both pages have a link to a free version, which contains subclass features up to level 8, allowing players to enjoy this adventure without needing to purchase the full version.

This subclass is **completely optional** and is **not required** to fully experience this adventure.

Chapter 1: Narrative Tools

A technologically advanced region has been beset by the necromantic Undead Horde. Its origins are unknown, and the only documented effects are those observed from the fall of cities past. Cities scramble to build high walls and elevated infrastructure to halt the undead march, while any attempts to study the nature of this horde fall by the wayside, as academies and institutes crumble as quickly as the undead spreads.

This section shows various tools for you to introduce this adventure to the players, especially if you already have an ongoing campaign. A lot of these may not necessarily come up during the session, but it helps frame your mindset around the adventure's setting elements.

The Undead Horde

The Undead Horde is an ever-growing collection of the walking dead. Its origins are unknown, but the spread of this devouring mass is said to have started in the fringes of the region. While illegal necromancy is certainly involved, not a lot of information regarding the nature of these creatures is known. A few things are consistent.

- Whatever magic powering the undead only affects Beasts and Humanoids.
- Each of these corpses can instantly transfer a magical curse to any applicable creature it kills, or any applicable corpse in its vicinity, that adds its victims to the Horde.
- A Beast or Humanoid will slowly turn into one of these corpses if it gets wounded by such undead.

More details about the Undead Horde, as well as individual Undead, are in Chapter 3: Special Adventure Mechanics.

Capital Bastion

The final destination of this adventure is the capital of the region, called Capital Bastion. This is the safest and most fortified city, and has become a haven for refugees fleeing the Undead Hordes.

Crawling Cataphract

The Crawling Cataphract is a major set piece of this adventure, and one of the key technological marvels of the troubled region. It serves as the main base of operations of the party and is both the starting and ending location of each of the adventure's major challenges. It's effectively a train that takes the adventurers along the tracks and ultimately to their final destination. While its form and function have features that resemble a train, you can tweak it to fit the nature of your setting. For example, instead of a simple steam engine, it's a mechanical caterpillar-like creature that crawls upside down along an organic track.

More information on how the Cataphract can be used throughout the adventure is detailed in Chapter 4: The Crawling Cataphract.

Timeline Considerations

Depending on your campaign and its setting, the rise of the Horde could have occurred as recently as a few months, or long enough to have become an endemic problem that has transformed the region's culture and infrastructure, as its territory is slowly eaten by the march of the dead. Here are some things to consider.

Size of the Region. A recent uprising of undead can quickly engulf a smaller region, but might be able to easily control the flow of information outside its borders. Alternatively, a larger region can accommodate "safety gaps" where certain towns and cities inside its borders barely even feel the threat of the Horde.

Technology of the Region. While the region is considered "technologically advanced," consider whether its infrastructure is fast enough to erect its walls or elevate its mass transit systems. Regardless of the level of technology, this region's main nation (or nations) are capable of creating mass transit vehicles like trains.

Enough Time to Adapt. It's possible that this region is simply known for its hive-like Undead, and its society's infrastructure is built around escaping the many Hordes that dot the landscape. This can come in the form of tall and impregnable walls integrated into the architecture, elevated transit routes and communal spaces, and strict and uncompromising societal laws regarding cursed individuals.

Neighboring Areas. Consider whether the neighboring areas have already caught wind of the region's troubles. If the Horde has only been a problem for a few months, the neighbors would realistically start asking questions. Any longer, and either the region has closed its borders to protect its neighbors, or the horde only seems to consume the region in its entirety, while the rest of the world is left questioning the region's fate.

Timing and Foreshadowing. If the adventure comes up mid-campaign, consider why the region's undead problem hasn't been talked about yet.

Adding to Your Campaign

It's possible to add this in the middle of an ongoing campaign. Here are a few ideas.

In Medias Res. It's entirely possible that the Horde comes out of nowhere, and the general populace is none the wiser. You can start the adventure with the players already on the run from the Horde for the past few in-game days, and in their journey to find safety, they end up in the border town of a region whose infrastructure is specifically built around surviving the Horde. This is the easiest way to start this adventure, but it's best for campaign settings where the players aren't fully aware of the wider world, or you haven't revealed the world's details to them yet.

Seed the Threat. Depending on the urgency and the scale of the threat, seeding news of a technologically advanced region going silent would provide good foreshadowing to prepare your players. You can do this over the course of 1 to 2 sessions leading up to this adventure to establish more information about the region itself: what it's known for (such as its rail infrastructure), when it started to go silent, and perhaps news of territorial closure as borders become locked off from the outside.

Character Ties. A party member with the Artisan, Merchant, or Noble background may get a message or a *Sending* regarding the region's troubles. This character can be from one of the key NPCs of the adventure (see Chapter 2: Key NPCs below). Consider setting the region far from the party's current location, requiring a few in-game weeks of travel, and slowly uncovering more news of the events as the party gets closer.

Overarching Goals

Survival is the overarching goal, but many secondary objectives can be more narratively satisfying to fulfill, as well as the rewards that come with their success. Here are a few ideas.

The Key to Salvation. Along the journey towards Capital Bastion, the party managed to discover the source of this horde. They need to get this information to powerful people in the haven to stage a counterattack.

Deliver the Scion. The Scion bears a blood-bound seal within them. By activating this seal within Capital Bastion, a neighboring nation from beyond the borders can teleport straight to the capital to help quell the Undead Horde. But this support comes with strings attached, as the allied army is only willing to lend assistance on the condition that the neighboring monarch claims the Scion as a paramour. Delivering the Scion to Capital Bastion alive and well is of utmost importance to stopping this horde.

A Personal Need. Capital Bastion has a key individual or a key item that the party needs. However, whether the officials of the haven city are willing to help would depend on how much they contributed while in the Crawling Cataphract.

Motivating Your Players

Your players should have a good and self-motivated reason to reach Capital Bastion. You can tie these motivations to the encounters in **Setting the Stage: Border Town** in **Chapter 5: The Journey** for a tighter plot. The following are additional ideas.

An Even More Pressing Need. One of the party members or a key NPC may have gotten afflicted by a weakened version of the Horde's curse. The progression is slower, likely due to the encounter being very far from its necromantic source, but their fate is ultimately sealed unless a cure is found. Investigating the remains of the undead attacker would lead the party to the troubled region.

They Know the Cure. Perhaps the party has access to an easy way to remove the curse from afflicted individuals.

Treasure. If nothing else, offer a tangible reward to your players in the form of treasure. This can come in the form of special weapons, such as the acquisition of Firearms, which can be found on page 72 of the *2024 Dungeon Master's Guide* under "Firearms." Be careful, however, as adding this to your ongoing campaign might introduce balancing difficulties in future sessions.

Chapter 2: Key NPCs

This adventure involves being part of a refugee group trying to survive the journey towards the Capital Bastion. This section outlines the key NPCs, their individual priorities, and potential rewards at the end of this adventure. Some rewards are magic items, which are detailed in Chapter 6: Magic Items.

> **Player Motivators**
> Certain types of players are motivated by treasure or loot. The rewards granted by certain NPCs are meant to encourage players to keep them alive to the end of the adventure. Whenever the party meets an NPC for the first time, feel free to break the 4th wall and let them know that a reward (magic item rarity, gold, etc.) is in store for them if the NPC reaches Capital Bastion alive.

Laborers

These are groups of individuals who work on the Cataphract and mostly work for one of the crew. Laborers can fall under one of the following roles.

Stokers and Shovelers. Around 3 or 5 people are tasked with ensuring the boiler is lively at the discretion of the Firemaster.

Guards and Scouts. Around 4 to 6 individuals help secure the safety of the Cataphract. They are mostly assigned to fight the undead, but may be needed to quell any internal conflicts that arise between passengers. They are under the command of the Security Commander.

Quartermasters. Around 2 to 4 individuals are tasked with ferrying tools and materials throughout the Cataphract under the command of the Conductor and the Maintenance Chief.

Healers. Around 2 individuals are tasked with healing the wounded. They also fall under the command of the Security Commander.

Kitchen Staff. Around 2 to 3 laborers under the Conductor are tasked with ensuring the quality and distribution of rations for the journey to Capital Bastion.

The Cataphract Crew

These characters are several individuals who command the majority of the Crawling Cataphract's operations. The crew of this particular Cataphract has been handpicked by the region's sovereign to safely deliver The Scion. They are committed to the mission and are especially loyal to the sovereign, but are not above sacrificing their objectives for their own safety. They can be one of the following roles.

Engineer. They drive the Cataphract, choosing the rail line and managing the throttle and brakes.

Firemaster. Monitors the boiler pressure and heat, and leads laborers to feed coal into the machine.

Conductor. In charge of Cataphract logistics, manifests, and passengers.

Security Commander. They are part of the same staff The Guardian is assigned to, but are more concerned with the overall safety of the Cataphract. In terms of priority, the Scion's safety is first and foremost, followed by the other officers, and then the passengers. Due to the region's technological advancements and the precision needed to fight the Undead from fast-moving vehicles, Guards and scouts under the Security Commander are outfitted with Hunting Rifles, which can be found on page 72 of the *2024 Dungeon Master's Guide* under "Firearms."

Maintenance Chief. Oversees the overall integrity.

The Elder

The Elder is a respected figure among the passengers and refugees of the Cataphract. They prioritize the safety of their people above all else, but may be swayed once death is within whispering distance.

Family Heirloom. If this character reaches Capital Bastion alive and is Friendly to the party, they may reward them with the Conduction Ingot **(Uncommon)**.

The Guardian

This character is tasked with the welfare of the Scion. They are loyal and dedicated to serving the Scion.

My Prized Possession. If this character reaches Capital Bastion alive and is Friendly to the party, they may reward them with a Hunting Rifle and the Everbullet **(Rare)**.

The Politico

This character accompanied The Scion during their journey beyond the region's borders. They are mostly self-interested and would try to curry favor or prioritize personal gain. They also see themselves as above commoners and typically carry a sense of entitlement.

My Connections Will See To Your Reward. If this character reaches Capital Bastion alive and is Friendly to the party, they may reward them with a deed to one **level 5 Special Facility**. This can be found in "Chapter 8: Bastions" starting from page 333 of the *2024 Dungeon Master's Guide*. Alternatively, the party can instead gain a promissory note in the Politico's name, which can be traded in any major city for 2,500 Gold Pieces.

The Rebel

This character is a rising figure among the passengers and refugees of the Cataphract. They have no love for the ruling class, who are blind and deaf to the laborers' struggles. And they see an opportunity to be seen, as they spot the Scion board the Cataphract.

Take Care of Her, Buddy. If this character reaches Capital Bastion alive and is Friendly to the party, they may reward them with the Big Mistake **(Rare)**.

The Scion

This character is the child of the region's sovereign. The party encounters this character at the start of this adventure, having just returned from beyond the borders to broker support to help quell the Undead Horde. They are desperately trying to reach Capital Bastion to fulfill their end of the agreement with the neighboring nation.

May This Keep You Safe. If this character reaches Capital Bastion alive and is Friendly to the party, they may reward them with the Iron Sovereign's Protection **(Rare)**.

Chapter 3: Special Adventure Mechanics

This adventure has a few custom mechanics to fully experience it. The following section outlines how these mechanics are run during the session.

Morale

Surviving the journey to Capital Bastion requires tremendous effort. Morale represents this combination of crew confidence, discipline, as well as supplies for sustenance. This also serves as a narrative indicator of the current state of the Cataphract's passengers in terms of physical and mental health.

Starting Morale. When the adventure begins, Morale starts at 10.

Maximum Morale. Morale cannot exceed 15.

Raising or Reducing Morale. Certain objectives during challenges can raise or reduce Morale.

0 Morale. If Morale is at 0 at the end of a challenge, each party member receives 1 level of Exhaustion, as the Cataphract strains its supplies, or the crew has descended into infighting due to madness or stress.

Optional. This is an optional rule meant to add a layer of tension throughout the adventure. Your table can decide not to use this rule without significantly impacting the adventure.

> **Knowledge is Fun**
> If your table decides to use the Morale mechanic, make sure you tell the players of any Morale costs during challenges (such as objectives or at the end of a challenge). This is meant to be a source of narrative tension for the players, and knowing the costs of certain actions will help inform their decisions.

Challenges as "Rooms"

The journey to Capital Bastion is fraught with challenges that threaten various resources. While the in-game journey spans hundreds of miles, you can compare this adventure with a traditional dungeon crawl and treat each challenge as if scouring a dungeon "room."

Stat Blocks

Each section uses various undead stat blocks for combat encounters. While a section contains a list of encounter groups, you can use any stat block (up to the recommended XP budget), with a change to its creature type and new traits and actions added.

Creature Type. Change the stat block's creature type to Undead.

Dead Vessel (Trait). This creature has Immunity to the Poison damage type, and the Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Poisoned, and Unconscious conditions. In addition, it has Blindsight with a range of 60 feet.

Soul Tethered (Trait). This creature is part of the Undead Horde. It can understand the languages it knew in life, but can only speak in grunts. It is Hostile to any Beast or Humanoid it can sense, and it follows the will of the Undead Horde, which it can sense as long as it's in the same plane of existence.

Flesh for the Horde (Trait). *Charisma Saving Throw:* DC 13, any Beast or Humanoid that takes damage from this creature's melee attack. If the target is reduced to 0 Hit Points by its melee attack, the target automatically fails. *Failure:* The target is cursed. After each hour since becoming cursed, it must repeat the saving throw, suffering 1 Exhaustion level on a failed save, or the DC increases by 1 on a successful one. The DC resets to 13 when the curse is lifted. *Success:* The target is not cursed.

If the target dies while cursed, it rises as part of the Undead Horde, changing its creature type to Undead and gaining the traits and actions in this section.

This creature can also target the corpse of a Beast or Humanoid with a melee attack. When it does so, and the attack hits, the corpse similarly rises as an Undead.

The curse can be lifted when a *Greater Restoration* or *Remove Curse* spell using a level 5+ spell slot is cast on the target.

Call of the Dead (Action). This creature bellows a deathly wail. Each Undead with the Soul Tethered trait within 300 feet of it is aware of any living Beast or Humanoid within 100 feet of this creature. In addition, the Undead Horde moves closer by 10 feet.

The Undead Horde

Most of the challenges in this adventure involve completing certain objectives before the Horde catches up to the party. Visually, this is a writhing mass of many Undead creatures, crawling, shambling, and stumbling over each other like an undulating wave of limbs. There are many Hordes in the region. And while each one is composed of a finite number of Undead, it is virtually impossible for a small party of adventurers to completely destroy one.

From the Horizon. The Horde does not immediately appear during a challenge. When certain conditions are met, it will appear from one edge of the map and take its turn to move towards the Crawling Cataphract.

Gargantuan Swarm. When the Horde appears, it is a Gargantuan swarm of Medium to Huge Undead. It has the following additional properties.

Space. It occupies a space of 50 feet by 50 feet, and reaches up to 15 feet high.

Swarm. The Horde can occupy another creature's space and vice versa.

Squeeze. It can move through an opening large enough for a Medium creature. Moving through such a space is Difficult Terrain for the Horde.

Malleable. The Horde can morph into different configurations of its occupied space. Regardless of configuration, it must occupy a total of 500 feet on the ground (or 100 squares on a grid), and there must be no unoccupied space within it. For example, it can be ten 10-foot contiguous squares.

Targeting the Horde. When a creature targets the Horde with an attack or a damaging spell, it instead targets a space occupied by the Horde.

Horde Traits. The Undead Horde is not a conventional stat block. It has the following traits:

Hit Points. The Undead Horde has 1000 Hit Points.

AC and Saving Throws. The Undead Horde has no AC, and any attack made against it automatically hits. In addition, it automatically fails Dexterity saving throws, but automatically succeeds all other types of saves.

Horde Resistances and Immunities. The Horde has Immunity to Necrotic and Psychic damage, while it has Resistance to all other damage types except Radiant or Thunder. Similarly, the Horde has Immunity to all conditions. Damage from a Large or larger object (such as Siege Equipment from page 96 of the *2024 Dungeon Master's Guide*) or from falling ignores the Horde's Resistances.

Thin the Horde. Whenever the Horde loses 200 Hit Points, it loses mass equal to a 10-foot-by-10-foot space centered around the nearest space where it took the triggering damage.

Deadly Terrain. The Horde's space is considered Difficult Terrain. Whenever a creature moves 10 feet within the Horde's space, it takes 18 (4d8) Necrotic damage. Similarly, a creature takes 9 (2d8) Necrotic damage whenever it moves 10 feet within a space up to 40 feet above the Horde's space.

Flesh for the Horde. Whenever a creature takes Necrotic damage from The Horde, it makes a Charisma saving throw as if saving against the Flesh for the Horde trait (see **Stat Blocks** above).

No Reactions. The Horde cannot take Reactions, but it can trigger Opportunity Attacks.

The Horde's Turn. When the Horde appears in the current challenge, the DM calls for an Initiative roll as if combat had started. The Horde takes its turn at the bottom of the round, once each creature has taken its turn. During combat, the following rules apply:

Movement. The Horde has a Speed of 30 feet. On the Horde's turn, it moves toward the Crawling Cataphract in the most direct path available to it, or moves toward the nearest living creature. If the Horde is in a Malleable configuration, choose one 5-foot-by-5-foot space on one edge of the Horde's space and move it to a space of your choice within 30 feet of it. Then have the rest of its mass move toward that space.

Among the Dead. When the Horde starts its turn while a creature with 0 Hit Points is within its space, that creature instantly dies and becomes part of the Horde. Similarly, when the Horde starts its turn while a corpse of a former Best or Humanoid is within its space, that corpse vanishes and becomes part of the Horde.

Mass of Scratches and Bites. At the start of the Horde's turn, each creature within its space takes 18 (4d8) Necrotic damage, while each creature within 5 feet of the Horde takes 9 (2d8) Necrotic damage. Similarly, a creature in a space 40 feet directly above the Horde's space takes 9 (2d8) Necrotic damage, provided no obstacles block the space between the creature and the Horde.

Reaching the Crawling Cataphract. When the Horde starts its turn while within 5 feet of the Crawling Cataphract, reduce Morale by 1.

Breathing Room. Whenever the Horde takes at least 50 damage within the round, the Horde's advance is suppressed until the end of its next turn. Any damage in excess of 50 does not carry over to the next round. While suppressed, the Horde can only move up to 10 feet during its turn, any damage it deals is halved, and a creature moving through its space can move normally.

Not Meant to Win

The party is not meant to win against an Undead Horde. Don't be afraid to break the 4th wall if necessary to inform the players that staying to fight the Horde is a death sentence.

Track Damage, Not Hit Points

For DMs, have a running counter that starts at 0 at the top of the round. Each time the Horde takes damage, add the damage to this counter (accounting for its Resistances). When the counter reaches 50, the Horde is suppressed until the start of the next round. Tracking Hit Points is only relevant if the party has access to Siege Equipment or similar objects.

Chapter 4: The Crawling Cataphract

A major set piece of this adventure is the train-like vehicle called The Crawling Cataphract.

Cataphract Speed

The Crawling Cataphract has a travel pace of 20 miles per hour (fast pace), 15 miles per hour (normal pace), or 10 miles per hour (slow pace). The Cataphract takes 1 minute to switch between different paces (including a full stop). Outside of combat, the 1-minute switch between paces is negligible in the calculation of travel time to Capital Bastion.

Cataphract Directions. The Cataphract moves forward or backward along a track. The term "forward" is the direction of the track the Engine car is facing, while "reverse" is the direction facing the rear-most car.

Slower in Reverse. While the Cataphract is moving in reverse, its travel pace is halved.

> **Don't Think Too Much About Time and Pace**
> Measuring the time it takes for the Crawling Cataphract to reach Capital Bastion is not too relevant in the adventure. The speed of the vessel is more for verisimilitude and for groups that are particular about such details.

Crawling Cataphract Turn

During combat, the Crawling Cataphract takes its turn at the start of each round.

Cataphract Actions. During its turn, the Cataphract can take up to two actions provided by its available cars. These actions are further outlined under Car Types later in this chapter.

Cataphract Speed During Combat. At the start of the Cataphract's turn, it moves 300 feet forward along the track, or 150 feet if moving in reverse, regardless of its current travel pace. If the Cataphract is at a Full Stop (see **Engineer Actions** under "**Engine**" below), the Cataphract doesn't move at the start of its turn.

Different Cars

The Crawling Cataphract has different types of cars, each of which serves a function.

Colored Spaces. Each car has a map with colored spaces. Each color corresponds to a special function of the room.

General Spaces. Certain colored spaces appear in several types of cars. These are the following spaces:

Cataphract Exterior. This space indicates the armor plating and inner mechanics of the Cataphract. This space is generally inaccessible and is considered a solid obstruction (such as a wall). Each 10-foot-by-10-foot area of the exterior has an AC of 20, 50 Hit Points, has Resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage, and Immunity to Poison and Psychic damage. When the area is reduced to 0 Hit Points, the area is breached and has a 10-foot-by-10-foot hole that exposes the interior of the Cataphract.

Walkway. This space is designed for foot traffic and can comfortably accommodate Medium creatures moving through it.

Car Door. This space is a heavy, sealed door. A creature can take a Utilize action to open or close this door. This space also indicates entry or exit points to travel between cars, or as a portal between the Cataphract and the surrounding environment. This airtight door has an AC of 17, 25 Hit Points, has Resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage, and Immunity to Poison and Psychic damage. A DC 20 Strength check can force a sealed car door open.

Car Types

The following cars are organized in a recommended order, from front-most car to rear-most car.

> **Knowledge is Fun: Car Edition**
> It's not a bad idea to let your players know how each of the Crawling Cataphract's cars works. This allows them to make informed tactical decisions and feel the sting of loss when a car needs to be detached.

Engine

This car is the heart of the Crawling Cataphract.

Essential Car. This car is an essential part of the Cataphract, and it cannot be detached from the rest of the vehicle.

Engine. This car houses the main engine (which similarly houses the boiler and the firebox) at the head of the car, which is situated at the very front of the Cataphract. The Firemaster and their team of 3 to 5 stokers and shovelers work in this area.

Driver's Cabin. Situated behind the Engine is a small cabin where the Engineer controls the Cataphract. An observation deck that lets individuals peer outside the Cataphract from either flank of the cabin is also situated in this room. Finally, a viewing periscope can be found here that can be used to see ahead or behind the Cataphract. Around 1 to 2 scouts are assigned here.

Engineer Actions. During the Crawling Cataphract's turn, the Engineer can take one of the following actions:

Full Stop. The Engineer engages the Cataphract's brakes. The Cataphract moves 100 feet along the track before coming to a Full Stop. Until Accelerate or Reverse is used, the Cataphract will not move during its turn.

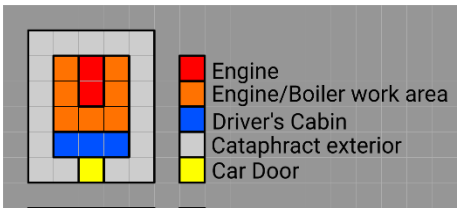
Accelerate. The Engineer accelerates the Cataphract. If the Cataphract is at a Full Stop, it moves 150 feet forward along the track in the current turn instead. Otherwise, the Cataphract moves forward along its track for an additional 300 feet. The Engineer can't take this action if the Cataphract is moving in reverse.

Reverse. The Engineer sets the Cataphract in reverse, moving it 150 feet in reverse along the track. This action can only be taken if the Cataphract is at a Full Stop.

Switch Tracks. The Engineer switches to a different track ahead.

Detach Car. The Engineer detaches a car. Doing so also detaches the other cars behind the chosen car, immediately creating a 10-foot gap between the detached car and the rest of the Cataphract. This distance increases by 40 feet at the start of the next round (50-foot gap), and this total distance doubles for each succeeding round thereafter (100 feet, 200 feet, 400 feet, and so on). The detached car comes to a full stop after 1 minute.

Layout. The Engine Car is a 20-by-15-foot space that is 10 feet high, with an additional 5 feet worth of the Cataphract's exterior. This area is further divided by the different work areas of the car.



Artillery

The Artillery car houses the defensive facilities of the Cataphract.

Siege Equipment. This car can accommodate up to 6 Large or smaller siege equipment, which can be found under the Siege Equipment section on page 96 of the *2024 Dungeon Master's Guide* or on page 255 of the 2014 version. Ballistae and cannons are common siege equipment used by Crawling Cataphracts. Each Siege Equipment is mounted on the exterior of the Cataphract's roof.

Siege Cabin. A small cabin with two seats oriented vertically that allows the Cataphract crew to take the actions of the adjacent siege equipment from inside the Artillery car. A creature inside the cabin can see outside the Cataphract as if looking from the location of the siege equipment. The cabin can also be entered from outside via a hatch that directly connects to the Cataphract Exterior. A cabin can hold up to two Medium creatures, with each one able to take an action granted by the siege equipment.

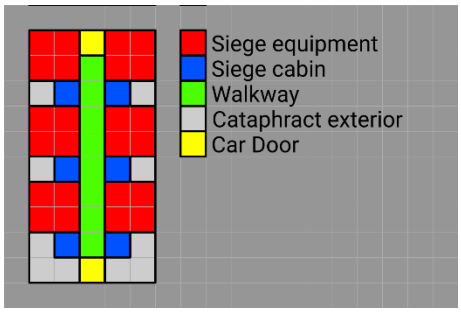
Officer and Morale Requirement. The Security Commander or another NPC taking on this role must be conscious in order for the Cataphract crew to use any of the Artillery actions (see below) during the Cataphract's turn. In addition, there must be at least 3 Morale for each cabin. Otherwise, a creature can commandeer it during its own turn.

Artillery Actions. During the Crawling Cataphract's turn, a Cataphract crew can take one of the following actions:

Load and Aim. The crew takes up to two of the siege equipment's Utilize actions (such as the Ballista's load and aim).

Engage Siege Equipment. The crew takes the siege equipment's special action (such as the Ballista's Ballista Bolt action).

Layout. The interior of the Artillery Car is a 40-by-5-foot walkway that is 10 feet high and alternates with a 5-foot siege cabin on each side.



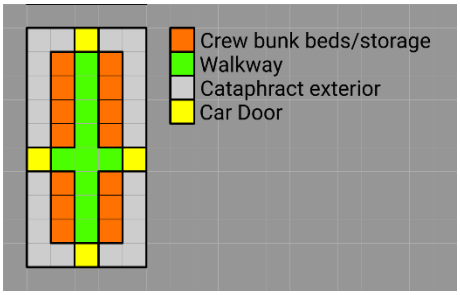
Crew Quarters

This car houses the crew of the Crawling Cataphract. This is mainly used as a place of rest for the crew and a triage in case of injuries. Quartermasters and healers work here.

Place of Rest. A creature can finish a Short Rest in this car in only half the time.

Bunk Beds. This car has bunk beds and storage space for the crew to rest. This area is Difficult Terrain.

Layout. The interior of the Crew Quarters car is a 40-by-5-foot walkway that is 10 feet high. Similar 10-foot-high two-tiered bunk beds are on both sides of the car.



Passenger

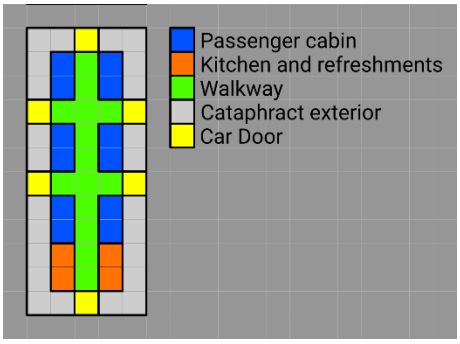
This car houses several comfortable cabins for distinguished passengers. The Conductor, as well as the kitchen staff, work here. Similarly, the Security Commander would be stationed here to protect any important individuals.

Passenger Cabin. Comfortable lodgings, along with overhead compartments for personal storage. These cabins are Difficult Terrain.

Kitchen and Refreshments. This car has a nook for serving food and beverages to the passengers. These nooks are Difficult Terrain.

Luxurious. When a creature finishes a Short Rest in this car, it regains 9 (2d8) Hit Points and removes 1 Exhaustion level. A creature can only use the car in this way once for the entire adventure.

Layout. This 10-foot-high car has a 50-foot-long central walkway, with branching paths to the car doors on each side. Several 10-by-5-foot passenger cabins flank the car, ending in a nook for serving food and beverages.



Cargo

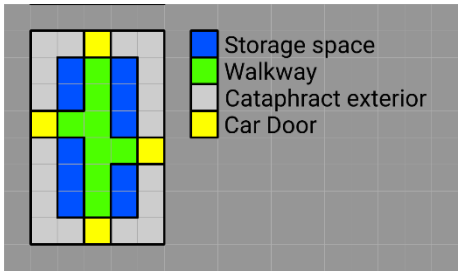
This car is intended for storing supplies for the journey, but is versatile enough to cover multiple functions. Guards are often stationed here.

Organize and Distribute. A creature can take an hour in this car to organize and distribute supplies. Doing so replenishes 3 Morale. This can only be done once for the entire adventure.

Special Supplies. A creature that finishes a Short Rest in this car can regain a number of expended spell slots with a combined level of 3. Alternatively, a creature can regain one use of a class feature or species trait that replenishes after finishing a Long Rest (such as the Sorcerer's Innate Sorcery feature or the Aasimar's Celestial Revelation trait). A creature can only use the car in this way once for the entire adventure.

Cargo Hold. If this car has been detached, Morale decreases by 3.

Layout. This car is a 30-by-15-foot space that is 20 feet high, meant to hold supplies.



Chapter 5: The Journey

This chapter outlines the various encounters and challenges you can place upon the party.

> **No Long Rests**
> The journey to Capital Bastion takes 10 to 12 hours. To ensure the tension is kept high, limit or prevent the use of Long Rests for players. This can be justified by the constant threat of the undead among the passengers or the uncomfortable conditions in the cars.

Setting the Stage: Border Town

The adventure starts when the party arrives in a border town in the new region.

Establish the Urgency. When the party arrives, the townsfolk are already moving towards the Cataphract Station. Asking around, the party discovers that there have been sightings of "The Horde," and the town was ordered to evacuate.

Establish the Setting. Describe the loud whistling of steam and the roar of metal charging into the distance, as the first of the Crawling Cataphracts depart.

A Chance Encounter. The party sees an entourage of soldiers guarding a few people in expensive-looking clothes. This is the Scion surrounded by The Guardian and perhaps one or two Politicos. This is meant to endear the players to the Scion and their entourage (positively or negatively) and give the party a central role in the adventure. Use any combination of the following options to achieve this.

I Know You. One or more party members may have certain bonds with the Scion, the Guardian, or the Politico. A character with the Merchant or Noble background may be familiar with the Scion and the Politico. Meanwhile, a character with a Criminal, Guard, or Soldier background may be familiar with the Guardian.

That Crest Looks Familiar. The party may identify the crest of the Scion. Depending on what the party needs, as established in **Overarching Goals** or **Motivating Your Players** from **Chapter 1: Narrative Tools**, let your players know that ensuring the Scion's survival in this adventure would easily give them what they need in Capital Bastion.

We Need Warriors. The Guardian or Politico may immediately approach the party, noting their battle-hardened appearance, and offer them a job to see them safely into Capital Bastion. The Politico may even offer a reward (500 GP).

The Disgruntled Laborers. The party notes a small group of laborers glowering at the Scion and their entourage. This encounter is meant to endear the players to the Rebel and the other Laborers (positively or negatively), as some players or character backstories may be more interested in the working class. Use any combination of the following options to achieve this.

Long Time, No See. A character with the Artisan, Charlatan, Criminal, Guard, or Urchin background may have personal ties with the Rebel.

Fight the Power. The Rebel may approach the party with tales of rebelling against the rich and powerful, and a long-held belief that the Undead Horde is a construct of the monarchy meant to keep the people down. If the party is interested, the Rebel may reveal plans to take the Scion hostage and take their personal Cataphract to Capital Bastion.

Cutpurse. The Rebel and their group may attempt to pickpocket one party member. If successful, the Rebel takes off with the party's belongings towards the Cataphract Station.

Limit Party Interactions. Try not to spend too much time setting the stage, as this is only meant to provide information and transition the party into the first challenge. The party can also learn more about the region or the Undead Horde from various sources, such as posters, signage, or NPC interactions. It's also possible for the party to come into an early conflict with the Scion's entourage or the Rebel's group, but it's diffused by the urgency of the first challenge.

First Challenge: The Cataphract Station

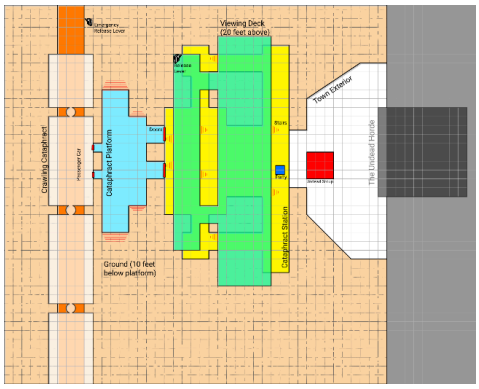
The party arrives at the Cataphract Station, witnessing a clash between the Scion's guards and the townsfolk that has yet to board a Crawling Cataphract. Currently, there is only one Cataphract in the station, and only the Scion and their entourage have been allowed to board. Meanwhile, several Cataphract Crew are going through the final checks and procedures before the vessel leaves the station.

Chaos Descends. Before the party gets close to the Cataphract, the Horde breaks through the town, with several Undead creatures reaching the station. Much of the townsfolk near the Cataphract force their way into the vessel, while the entourage and some brave town guards protect the civilians. The locks of the Crawling Cataphract are still engaged during the unexpected arrival of The Horde, while the doors of the Cataphract's cars have been sealed by the crew. **Roll Initiative.**

> **Enough for a Horde**
> Before the crew seals the car doors, you can imply to the players that "a significant number" of townsfolk managed to force their way into the Cataphract. This is an important detail for the third challenge.

Map. This challenge uses "**Cataphract Station (43x43)**" as the map's layout. A separate file called "**Cataphract Station (43x43) + Placements**" indicates the suggested placements of the party and the enemies.

Special Map Effects. A lot of people are trying to cram into the Cataphract. The Cataphract Platform area is Difficult Terrain.



Cataphract Station (43x43) + Placements

Suggested Creatures. Each enemy creature for this encounter uses the changes, as well as the traits and actions from the **Stat Blocks** section. The following creatures from the *2025 Monster Manual* are recommended for this challenge's combat encounter:

- Wight x1 (CR 3)
- Ghast x2 (CR 2)
- Zombie x3 (CR 1/4)
- Encounter XP: 1750

The Undead Horde. The **Undead Horde** appears from the edge of the Town Exterior section of the map at the end of the first round.

Goal. The party must escape the Horde by boarding the Cataphract as it leaves.

Objectives. If the party does not intervene, the Horde will eventually reach the Cataphract. The party must complete the Board the Cataphract objective, but only after they have completed any one of the other objectives:

Board the Cataphract. The party must be inside the Crawling Cataphract once it leaves. Alternatively, the party can cling to the exterior of the Cataphract with a DC 17 Strength check, or in the gaps between cars with a DC 12 Strength check.

Convince the Scion's Guard. The party must head to the entrance of the Passenger Car. Once there, they must take the Influence action and succeed on a total of 3 checks that use Charisma. The DM determines whether a Charisma skill can be used. The DCs of each check are 13, 15, and 17, respectively, as the party attempts to convince the Guardian to let them inside the Crawling Cataphract. The successes do not need to be consecutive, but the objective fails when the party accumulates 3 failures. Once the party succeeds on all checks, the party is allowed inside.

The Cataphract leaves at the **start of the 4th round**, starting from the round the party boarded the Cataphract, as town guards and Cataphract crew sacrifice themselves to release the Cataphract locks. During this time, several more townsfolk will attempt to force their way into the vessel. The party can allow them inside, or close the doors behind them as a Utilize action. Allowing more townsfolk inside increases Morale by 2, but closing it decreases Morale by 2.

It's possible for the Horde to get close to the Cataphract or breach its exterior while the party waits for the Cataphract to leave. See the **Reaching the Crawling Cataphract** rule under the **The Undead Horde** section. Similarly, rules for the **Car Door** and the **Cataphract Exterior** can be found in **Chapter 4: The Crawling Cataphract** under the **Different Cars** section.

Hold back the Horde. The party must reduce the opposition while the Cataphract crew disengages the locks. To complete this objective, the party must defeat all creatures that are part of the Undead Group or deal a total of 50 damage to the Undead Horde. See the **Breathing Room** rule under the **The Undead Horde** section.

Once this objective is complete, the Cataphract leaves at the **start of the 4th round**, starting from the current round. The Cataphract leaves early once the party boards the Cataphract or if the Undead Horde is less than 10 feet away from the Cataphract at the start of the round (whichever happens first). Completing this objective also increases Morale by 3.

Release the Cataphract Locks. The party must find the mechanisms to disengage the locks on the Cataphract. One is on one corner of the Viewing Deck, but has become damaged in the chaos of the Horde's arrival. A creature within 5 feet of the lever can take the Study action and succeed on a DC 15 Investigation check to determine the damage. Whether or not the damage has been determined, a creature within 5 feet of the lever can take the Utilize action to force the lever down with a Strength check. If the damage has been determined, the DC is 12. Otherwise, the DC is 17. Failing the Strength check destroys the lever. Alternatively, the party can pull the Emergency Release Lever on the Ground by using a Utilize action while within 5 feet of it.

Once this objective is complete, the Cataphract leaves at the **start of the 4th round**, starting from the current round. The Cataphract leaves early once the party boards the Cataphract or if the Undead Horde is less than 10 feet away from the Cataphract at the start of the round (whichever happens first). Completing this objective also increases Morale by 2.

Stress and Fatigue. At the end of this challenge, the stress and fatigue of leaving the Cataphract station reduce Morale by 1.

Second Challenge: Cataphract Personalities

The party is allowed inside the Crawling Cataphract, as the townsfolk are being ushered to stay in the Cargo car. Currently, the vessel is headed to Capital Bastion, which is 180 miles from the border town.

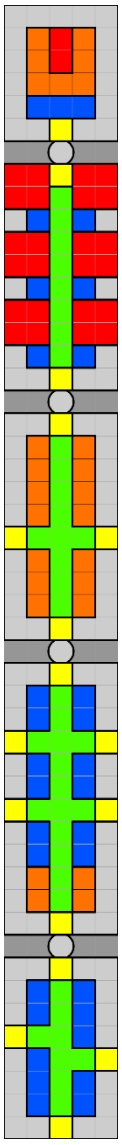
Passage of Time. This challenge happens over the course of **6 hours**. From the encounters in this section (see below), **Violent Infighting** occurs **3 hours** from the beginning of this challenge. During this time, can attempt the **Pacify the Uprising** encounter or the **Genre Savvy** encounter. Another **3 hours** would pass after the resolution of **Violent Infighting**. The air of suspicion and tension inside the Cataphract makes it impossible to finish a Long Rest, even for species such as elves who can finish a Long Rest in half the time.

NPC Locations. The NPC locations within the Crawling Cataphract are indicated in the NPC Locations table.

NPC Locations

NPC	Cataphract Car
Cataphract Crew	
Conductor	Passenger
Engineer	Engine
Firemaster	Engine
Maintenance Chief	Crew Quarters
Security Commander	Artillery
Elder	Cargo
Guardian	Passenger
Laborers	Cargo
Politico	Passenger
Rebel	Cargo
Scion	Passenger

Map. This challenge uses "**Crawling Cataphract (5x50)**" as the map's layout.



Crawling Cataphract (5x50)

NPC Attitudes. Depending on the completed objectives from the first challenge, the disposition of certain NPCs may change, as shown on the Cataphract Attitudes Table. The players need not be aware of these attitudes, as this is meant to guide you with roleplaying how NPCs react to the party.

Cataphract Attitudes

NPCs	Convince The Scion's Guard (Close)	Convince The Scion's Guard (Allow)	Hold Back the Horde	Release the Cataphract Locks
Cataphract Crew	Indifferent	Hostile	Friendly	Friendly
Laborers	Indifferent	Friendly	Indifferent	Friendly
The Elder	Hostile	Friendly	Indifferent	Indifferent
The Guardian	Indifferent	Indifferent	Friendly	Friendly
The Politico	Friendly	Hostile	Indifferent	Indifferent
The Rebel	Hostile	Friendly	Friendly	Indifferent
The Scion	Hostile	Friendly	Friendly	Friendly

Genre Savvy. Players may seek out cursed passengers within the Cataphract. This NPC can be discerned with a DC 18 Insight or Medicine check. Use any combination of the following options to prepare yourself in case the cursed passenger is discovered:

- Using the same Insight or Medicine check, hint at the players that it's nearly impossible to check for each and every passenger on the Cataphract for any bites or scratches.
- Isolating the NPC will cause distrust among the passengers, as it's unclear whether the discovered NPC is the only one hiding symptoms of the curse.
- Immediately revealing the cursed passenger will sow discord. Reduce Morale by 1.
- Should the players decide to kill the cursed passenger, reduce Morale by 2. Any Charisma check made toward the Cataphract Crew, the Politico, or the Guardian automatically passes (within reason), while any Charisma check made toward the Laborers, the Elder, and the Rebel has Disadvantage.
- The players may use this knowledge to help the Crew or the Laborers. The opinion of the Laborers will be split as to how to deal with this cursed passenger. The party may gain Advantage on their checks when dealing with the Laborer Uprising (see below), depending on how they present this information.

Laborer Uprising. Sealing the car doors when the Horde appeared has sown strong resentment from the Laborers towards the Cataphract Crew. The Elder is attempting to peacefully pacify the situation, but the Rebel is using this resentment to rally the Laborers under a banner of rebellion and would forcibly detach the Cargo car if their demands are not met.

They specifically want two things: for the weak and elderly to stay in the more comfortable Passenger car, and for the Scion to stay with them in the Cargo car as collateral.

Time-Sensitive Orders. At the Politico's behest, the Security Commander and the other Cataphract guards are ordered to quell the uprising. To give the Laborers time, the Security Commander has given the Laborers a few hours to cease before their team of Cataphract guards uses force. See **Passage of Time** above for the timing of the encounter.

Violent Infighting. If the party takes no action, certain NPCs may be slain in the ensuing chaos, as shown on the Rebellion Casualties table.

Rebellion Casualties

NPC	Chance of Death (d100)
The Elder	01-35
The Guardian	01-15
The Politico	01-15
The Rebel	01-75
The Scion	01-05

The Cataphract loses 3 Morale in the ensuing conflict. It's also possible the Laborers detach the Cargo car (01-25 on a d100 roll), forcing several Laborers into the Passenger car.

The party can attempt to peacefully resolve the situation, or at least mitigate the bloodshed (see Pacifying the Uprising below).

Pacifying the Uprising. The following methods are the recommended ways to pacify the uprising:

Remove the Rebel. The uprising can be prevented by helping the Elder convince the Laborers to cooperate, but a good number of the Laborers are loyal to the Rebel. If the party has the Elder's support, they have Advantage on Charisma checks on the Rebel. The Rebel responds to strength over reason, and the party might have to threaten the Rebel to cooperate or eliminate them from the Cataphract.

Challenging the Rebel reduces Morale by 1. The Rebel has the game statistics of a **Scout Captain** from page 270 of the *2025 Monster Manual*, and is assisted by 3 Laborers, each of which has the game statistics of a **Scout** from the same page. During this encounter, the Rebel can take a Utilize action to detach the Cargo car, provided they are within 5 feet of the northern car door. The Rebel's Scout Captain stat block uses a Shotgun, which can be found on page 72 of the *2024 Dungeon Master's Guide* under "Firearms." Similarly, each Scout uses a Hunting Rifle.

Assist the Laborers. The uprising can be assuaged if the party can convince the crew to give in to the Laborers' demands. To do so, the party must convince the Guardian and the Politico. The Guardian is mainly concerned with the safety of the Scion and may be swayed if the Scion is persuaded. The Politico, however, is interested in self-preservation and comfort. Failing to convince this NPC may result in them ordering guards to attack the party.

Fighting the guards reduces Morale by 2. This encounter is composed of 2 **Knights** from page 184 of the *2025 Monster Manual* and 3 **Warrior Infantry** from page 320 of the same book. The Politico has the game statistics of a **Noble** from page 227 of the *2025 Monster Manual*, in case the party decides to engage this NPC in combat. The Knights and Warrior Infantry use a Hunting Rifle, while the Noble uses a Revolver, both of which can be found on page 72 of the *2024 Dungeon Master's Guide* under "Firearms."

The Guardian will not engage the party unless the Scion is threatened. The Guardian has the game statistics of a **Warrior Veteran** from page 320 of the *2025 Monster Manual*, and is joined by 2 **Knights**. The Warrior Veteran also uses a Hunting Rifle.

Convince Both Sides to Cooperate. The party must speak to various NPCs to set aside their differences until the Cataphract reaches Capital Bastion. For both sides to cooperate without bloodshed, the Rebel and the Politico must agree to work together. It's possible to leverage any special knowledge the party may have to sway key NPCs. Completing this objective increases Morale by 3.

Stress and Fatigue. The stress of having to deal with infighting and the fatigue brought about by the journey reduces Morale by 2.

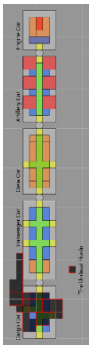
Third Challenge: Hidden Bite

Several individuals from among the townsfolk have been hiding a bite from the Undead before entering the Crawling Cataphract. It's also possible that these NPCs were not aware of the bite until their condition started to worsen.

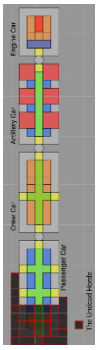
Preparedness. Depending on how well the party handled Genre Savvy from the previous challenge (if at all), the party may have certain advantages in taking on this challenge. Consider giving the party one round before the Undead Horde appears, as they have a sense of what or who to look out for when the Undead start to appear.

Trapped. A cursed passenger dies and becomes an Undead. In a matter of moments, an **Undead Horde** quickly forms from the rear car. This breaks through the car's Cataphract Exterior. This is considered as Reaching the Crawling Cataphract.

Map. This challenge uses "**Crawling Cataphract (5x50)**" as the map layout. A separate file called "**Crawling Cataphract (5x50) + Horde**" shows the recommended starting placement of the Undead Horde. If the Cargo car was detached in the second challenge, use "**Crawling Cataphract (5x41)**" as the map layout, with "**Crawling Cataphract (5x41) + Horde**" to see a recommended starting placement for the Horde.



Crawling Cataphract (5x50) + Horde



Crawling Cataphract (5x41) + Horde

NPCs. Other than the party, other key NPCs would be located throughout the Crawling Cataphract, as shown in the NPC Locations table in the previous challenge. Decide where to place these NPCs. For NPCs in the Cargo car, you can decide whether or not they immediately die once the Horde appears, or roll a d100 (01-45 indicates death). NPCs move at the start of the round and will generally try to avoid the Horde.

Goal. Remove the Undead from the Cataphract while staying inside the vessel.

Objectives. Check with the players first if they have a plan. The following objectives are recommended:

Key Mechanics

This challenge involves fighting the Undead Horde. The rules can be found in **Chapter 3: How to Run This Adventure** under the **The Undead Horde** section. This challenge uses rules for the **Engine** car and potentially the **Artillery** car. They can be found in **Chapter 4: The Crawling Cataphract** under the **Car Types** section. Similarly, rules for the **Cataphract Exterior** might also come into play. It can be found in the same chapter under the **Different Cars** section.

Detach the Car. The majority of the Undead Horde are gathered in one car. The party can signal to the Engineer to detach a car of their choice. This can be done from anywhere inside a car and does not require any action to do so, as communication machinery across the Cataphract transmits speech directly to the Driver's Cabin. See "**Detach Car**" under the **Engine** entry of the different **Car Types**.

Hold Down the Horde. The party must prevent the Horde from moving further into the Cataphract while its car is moving further away.

Use Artillery. The crew is wary of using the siege equipment in the Artillery car due to the Horde's close proximity to the Cataphract. The party can either convince the Security Commander (Influence action DC 15) to use the siege equipment, or the party can man the Siege Cabins themselves. See "**Siege Cabin**" under the **Artillery** entry of the different **Car Types**. When using the siege equipment to attack the parts of the Horde clinging to the Cataphract's Exterior, that area of the exterior takes damage equal to half the damage dealt to the Horde. The rules for the **Cataphract Exterior** can be found in **Chapter 4: The Crawling Cataphract** under the **Different Cars** section.

Stay in the Next Car. When the majority of the Horde's mass is at least 60 feet away from the Cataphract, the party must find ways to be in the vessel before it becomes impossible for them to catch up. This can be done in various ways, such as using class features (such as the Monk's Step of the Wind feature) or casting certain spells (such as the Dimension Door spell).

Alternatively, a party member can perform an incredible feat of physicality by making a DC 20 Strength check to leap up to 120 feet to the next car or a DC 20 Dexterity check to run up to 120 feet to the next car. Consider a success with a check of 17 to 19, but at the cost of receiving 2 Exhaustion levels.

Save NPCs. This is an optional objective, but each major NPC or group that survives by the end of this challenge increases Morale by 1. The following NPCs are considered major:

- The Elder.
- The Engineer and at least half of the other Cataphract Crew: Conductor, Firemaster, Maintenance Chief, and Security Commander.
- The Guardian.
- The Politico.
- The Rebel.
- The Scion.

Passage of Time. After dealing with the Horde, another 3 hours would pass before the next challenge. During this time, the players can take a Short Rest or interact with the surviving NPCs.

Stress and Fatigue. The stress of defending against the Horde from inside the Cataphract reduces Morale by 3.

Fourth Challenge: The Nexus of Rails

Capital Bastion can be seen on the horizon. Coming into view is the Nexus of Rails. A series of interconnected circular tracks that are meant to manage the flow of numerous Cataphracts going to and from the capital at once.

Too Quiet. The Nexus is strangely devoid of other Crawling Cataphracts. Scanning the area, the party would spot a massive amalgamation of Undead waiting along the tracks. **Roll Initiative.**

The Crawling Casket. The Crawling Casket is an Undead Horde with a more recognizable configuration of limbs, such as a massive pair of arms and innumerable legs hugging the tracks. Intermingling with this Gargantuan nightmare are the remains of other Crawling Cataphracts, seemingly the ones that left the border town ahead of you. The Crawling Casket's game statistics can be found in **Appendix A: Crawling Casket Stat Block**.

Map. This challenge uses "**Nexus of Rails (60x30)**" as the map layout. A separate file called "**Nexus of Rails (60x30) + Placements**" shows the recommended starting placement of the Crawling Cataphract and the Crawling Casket.

Interconnected Tracks. The Nexus of Rails is a series of interconnected circular tracks.

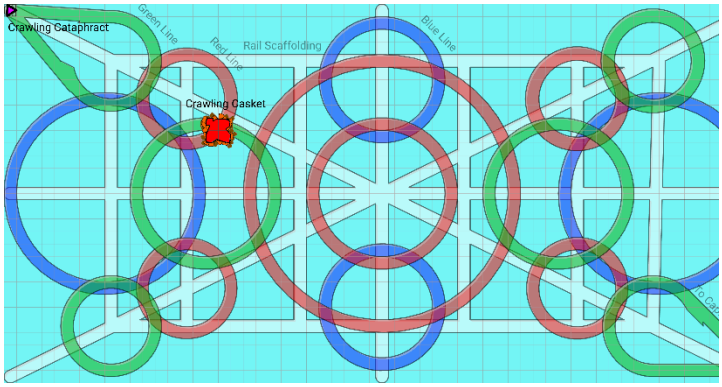
Rail Scaffolding. Supporting the Nexus of Rails is a Rail Scaffolding. This area is located 200 feet below the Interconnected Tracks.

Special Map Rules. This challenge changes the perspective of a normal combat encounter.

Ten-Fold Perspective. Each square on the map is equal to 50 feet.

All Party Members on the Cataphract. The Crawling Cataphract is represented by a vehicle that occupies the space of a single square. All party members are assumed to be on the roof of the Cataphract or inside the Cataphract. Movement and Speed of each party member do not apply on this map.

Melee Attacks. If the Crawling Cataphract is within 50 feet of the Crawling Casket, any character in the Cataphract can make a melee attack against the Casket. This can be described as a glancing blow as the two train-like vehicles pass by each other.



Nexus of Rails (60x30) + Placements

Goal. Reach Capital Bastion alive.

Objectives. The goal can be achieved in one of the following ways:

Defeat the Crawling Casket. Reducing the Crawling Casket to 0 Hit Points ensures the safety for the remainder of the trip to Capital Bastion.

Reach the Entrance Tunnel to Capital Bastion. The Crawling Cataphract can reach the entrance tunnel to Capital Bastion by reaching the space on the bottom right corner of the **Nexus of Rails** map. This tunnel is only wide enough to receive a single Crawling Cataphract, and the Casket would be unable to continue its pursuit.

Special Encounter Rules. The following special rules apply to this combat encounter:

Only the Cataphract Moves. The Crawling Cataphract represents the entire party. It only moves at the start of the round, as specified in **Chapter 4: The Crawling Cataphract** under the **Crawling Cataphract Turn** section. Similarly, other forms of movement, such as accelerating, reversing, or stopping, are outlined under the **Engineer Actions** of the **Engine** entry under **Car Types**.

One Track at a Time. The Cataphract only moves along a single-colored line at any given time (Blue Line, Green Line, or Red Line). It cannot move through the Rail Scaffolding. If the Engineer takes the Switch Tracks action, choose a different-colored line that intersects with the current line. The next time the Cataphract moves, it will move along the chosen line. As an example, in the "**Nexus of Rails (60x30) + Placements**" file, the Crawling Cataphract starts on the Green Line located in the upper left corner of the map. At the start of the round, the Engineer can take the Switch Tracks action to switch to the Blue Line or Red Line to make progress down the map.

Shared Hit Points. When Initiative is rolled, note the current Hit Points of all party members (including other allies such as summoned creatures) and add them all together. Similarly, pool together any Temporary Hit Points from each party member. Then add 25 additional Hit Points for each attached car of the Crawling Cataphract other than the Engine car. This represents the entire party fighting alongside the Crawling Cataphract to take on this threat. If these shared Hit Points are reduced to 0, the Crawling Cataphract is destroyed along with its passengers and the party, ending the adventure in failure.

Shared AC. The AC of the party is collectively set to the Cataphract Exterior's AC of 20.

Collision. When the Crawling Cataphract moves and occupies the space of the Crawling Casket, the Casket takes 27 (5d10) Bludgeoning damage and falls to the nearest Rail Scaffolding space 200 feet below.

End of the Line: Capital Bastion

After a harrowing encounter with the Crawling Casket, the entry tunnel that leads to one of Capital Bastion's many stations is within reach. The rewards granted by the end of this adventure can be found in **Chapter 6: Magic Items**.

Gauge how your players are enjoying this adventure so far, and choose one of the following outcomes for the end of this adventure.

City on Fire. The eyes of the Cataphract passengers are lit ablaze, as they see the fires spreading across the city reflected in their eyes. The Horde has breached even the impregnable walls of Capital Bastion, and safety is still nowhere in sight.

This shocking twist is appropriate if your party still has energy for at least one more combat encounter (there are none; this is just to gauge), and if the players enjoy this setting or style of adventure. At this point, the party has likely earned the trust of the Cataphract passengers. And with the likely fall of the monarch, the leadership and safety of this vessel now fall upon the party's shoulders. Deciding whether to resupply in Capital Bastion's station or push on to the nearest settlement is something that can be picked up in the next session.

Safe Haven. The setting sun glints against the tears flowing in the eyes of the passengers, as they find safety in the towering walls of Capital Bastion. The party meets with the sovereign of this region, hoping to acquire what they need. Meanwhile, if the Scion is alive, they would report the results of their negotiations with the neighboring nation.

This ending would be more satisfying for players who had a very difficult time in the previous challenge. This also makes for a potentially emotional hit if the party is unable to keep the Scion alive.

Chapter 6: Magic Items

The following magic items are unique to this adventure and are presented in alphabetical order.

Big Mistake

Weapon (Shotgun), Rare (Requires Attunement)

This tube-like Firearm has an unwieldy construction, and nearly bursting at the seams with haphazardly placed magical runes. You have proficiency with Shotguns while attuned to this weapon. In addition, you gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this weapon. It also has the following properties.

Rough and Tumble. You can use your Strength modifier instead of your Dexterity modifier for the attack and damage rolls using this weapon.

Up Close and Personal. You don't have Disadvantage on the attack roll when attacking an enemy within 5 feet of you.

No Hard Feelings. When you hit a target within this weapon's normal range, roll the damage dice twice and take the higher result.

Couldn't Ask for More. Once daily at dawn, if you have less than 10 Firearm Bullets, this weapon magically creates 2d4 + 2 Firearm Bullets (up to a maximum of 10).

Conduction Ingot

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This processed block of steel surges with electrical power.

Forge Weapon. When this block is pressed against a nonmagical Melee weapon for one uninterrupted hour (which can be done as part of a Short or Long Rest), the weapon absorbs the metal and transforms into a magical Melee weapon called the Conduction Arms.

Conduction Arms. This weapon requires attunement. While attuned, you have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this weapon. In addition, you can cast the *Witch Bolt* and *Lightning Bolt* spells once each, and you regain the ability to cast each spell daily at dawn. If you have the Spellcasting trait, you can use your spellcasting ability for these spells. Otherwise, Charisma is your spellcasting ability.

Reforge Metal. When you end your attunement with the Conduction Arms, the Conduction Ingot separates from the weapon and reconstitutes itself as a block of steel.

Everbullet

Weapon (Firearm Bullet), Rare (Requires Attunement)

This single piece of Hunting Rifle ammunition is affixed with powerful Conjuration and Evocation magics. You gain proficiency with Firearms while attuned to this item. When you attack using a Hunting Rifle, you can choose to chamber the Everbullet into the weapon. When you do so, you gain a +1 bonus to the attack and damage rolls. In addition, you ignore the Reload property of the weapon, as the bullet magically reconstitutes itself in the firearm's chamber as soon as the attack hits or misses. Similarly, the Everbullet you fired vanishes as soon as you hit or miss with the attack.

Iron Sovereign's Protection

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement by a Spellcaster)

This ornate crest bears the symbol of an influential family and is infused with various Abjuration magics. This crest has 10 charges.

Spells. While holding the crest, you can cast one of the spells on the following table from it, using your spellcasting ability. The table indicates how many charges you must expend to cast the spell. Some spells allow you to expend more charges to increase their level.

Spell	Charge Cost
Aid	2 per level
Beacon of Hope	3
Prayer of Healing	2 per level
Protection from Evil and Good	1
Remove Curse (level 5 version)	10
Sanctuary	1
Shield of Faith	1

Regaining Charges. The crest regains 2d4 + 2 expended charges daily at dawn.

Appendix A: Crawling Casket Stat Block

Crawling Casket

Gargantuan Undead, Neutral

Armor Class 20
Hit Points 246 (17d20 + 68)

Speed 30 ft. or 300 ft. while on tracks or rail scaffolding
Initiative +2 (12)

		MOD	SAVE			MOD	SAVE
STR	20	+5	+5	**INT**	3	-4	-4
DEX	12	+1	+1	**WIS**	18	+4	+8
CON	18	+4	+8	**CHA**	5	-3	-3

Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, Slashing from weapons other than Siege Equipment
Immunities Necrotic, Poison, Psychic; All Conditions
CR 12 (XP 8,400; PB +4)

Senses Truesight 50 ft., Passive Perception 14
Languages Understands Common plus one other language but can't speak

Traits

Dense Mass. The Casket takes no damage from falling.

Cataphract Engines. A creature with a Passive Perception of 14 or higher can see the engines of two other Crawling Cataphracts within the Casket's mass. This can also be spotted with a Search action (Perception check DC 14).

Each engine has an AC of 21, 30 Hit Points, Resistance to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage, and Vulnerability to Fire damage. When an engine is reduced to 0 Hit Points, it explodes, and the Casket takes 55 (10d10) Fire damage.

Actions

Multiattack. The Casket makes three melee Slam attacks or two ranged Slam attacks. It can replace one of its attacks and uses Grasp. Alternatively, it takes the Dash action and makes one Slam attack or uses Grasp.

Slam. *Melee or Ranged Attack Roll:* +9, reach 50 ft., or range 200/800 ft. *Hit:* 27 (5d8 + 5) Bludgeoning damage.

Grasp. While within 50 feet of a Huge or smaller creature, object, or vehicle, the Casket makes a DC 15 Strength check. On a successful check, the grasped creature, object, or vehicle has the Grappled condition.

Until the condition ends, the condition ends, the Casket has Advantage on attack rolls against the entity in its grasp. The Undead immediately releases its grasp when it takes at least 30 damage in a single round, ending the condition immediately.

Bonus Actions

Cacophony of Wails (Recharge 5–6). *Wisdom Saving Throw:* DC 17, each creature in a 50-foot Cone. *Failure:* The target is Stunned until the start of the Casket's next turn. *Success:* The target is Frightened until the start of the Casket's next turn.

Appendix B: Inspiration

This section contains an example setting that integrates this adventure's elements. It contains proper names and defined narrative elements that can inspire your creation of the setting, or use it as-is to run this adventure.

Tetsukamichi

An eastern region whose local dialect roughly translates to "the path the iron gods walk upon." This vast expanse of iron-rich plateaus is home to various interdependent clans, with a strong focus on ironworks and metallurgy. People in this land call themselves Ironfolk, giving reverence and respect to the land's bounty.

The Necromaw

The Necromaw is a collective term for the reanimated corpses of those who succumbed to the Necromaw's curse. These creatures have no other drive than to consume living flesh. Individual encounters with a Necromaw are generally a simple matter, but what makes them dangerous is their propensity to form entire hordes of twisted limbs and hungry maws, moving almost like liquid due to their sheer number.

Numbers should have been a simple matter, given the technological might of Tetsukamichi. But the most frightening aspect of the Necromaw is their ability to afflict their curse with a single scratch or bite, with little means to lift it other than slaying the afflicted.

While its origins are unknown, folk tales say the Necromaw originated from forging minerals from mined cursed land in Tetsukamichi. Little proof supports this other than the fact that Necromaw hordes started appearing from once undiscovered mineral deposits that have now become no man's lands. The threat of this curse has become so ingrained into the land that the region's architecture, societal laws, and technology are centered around defending against Necromaw Hordes.

Walls and Elevation

With few exceptions, nearly every settlement is elevated through natural land formations or artificial excavation. Protecting every settlement are tall iron walls called Yoroi.

The Iron Web

Most towns and cities in Tetsuakmichi are connected by elevated and fortified train tracks. Horse-drawn carriages are still viable, but are considered to be very dangerous means of transportation.

The Crawling Cataphract

The Crawling Cataphracts are train-like vehicles that run along the Iron Web. These steam-powered mass transit vehicles ferry people and supplies between settlements while providing fortified protection against the Necromaw.

Tetsuzo Clan

The ruling clan of the region. Their name translates to "Steel Weavers," and they are known for their mastery over the forge. Their innovations and craftsmanship have led to the creation of the Crawling Cataphracts, the Yoroi Walls, and other metallic marvels that are key to surviving the Undead Hordes. The current head of the clan is Tetsuzo Muteki-O, a wizened leader and famed blacksmith who designed the artillery mounts that allowed Crawling Cataphracts to be outfitted with siege weaponry.

Tetsu Mikazuchi

The pride and joy of the Tetsukamichi clans. Named after a local deity of steel and lightning, this capital city boasts the strongest Yoroi, and the largest Cataphract Station in the entire region.

Steel Horizons

Steel Horizons is a border town on the fringes of Tetsukamichi. Its architecture boasts the impregnable advances of the region's iron innovations, while keeping a healthy mix of various cultures from beyond the borders. Contemporary brickwork is mixed in with the traditional nature aesthetic that the Ironfolk generally adopt. The air is thick with the smell of burning iron, and the clanging of steel and the hustle of trade fill the town's soundscape.

Key NPCs

The following lists names and details to represent major NPCs from **Chapter 2: Key NPCs**.

The Elder: Blindsmith Ichi

Blindsmith Ichi was once a respected hobgoblin blacksmith in Steel Horizons. As his vision diminished with age, he would slowly assume the informal role of a community leader.

Personality Traits. Compassionate, fearful, hardworking, and soft-spoken.

Recent History. Ichi has recently finished his final piece of work: the Conduction Ingot. He hasn't held a hammer ever since.

Bonds. He worries about his son Monji, as his displeasure towards the ruling class has grown louder.

The Guardian: Calliphae Northsail

A triton foreigner from the northern regions, Calliphae was once a sailor whose dangerous privateering life would lead her to the borders of Tetsukamichi. She was taken in by the Tetsuzo clan and has sworn her loyalty ever since.

Personality Traits. Dedicated, loyal, stern, and terse.

Recent History. Her time guarding Muteki-O's daughter was fraught with assassins and highwaymen. She can't wait to see the scion safely in Tetsu Mikazuchi.

Bonds. She's left behind her privateering life, and has instead dedicated herself to serving the Tetsuzo clan. She has a certain fondness for Kyurei-Hime.

The Politico: Raigetsu Tanba

Half-elven leader of the Tanba clan, a retainer family loyal to the Tetsuzo clan. He is a hedonist who used his power and influence to amass as many of life's comforts as the region could provide.

Personality Traits. Cowardly, entitled, and haughty.

Recent History. He went with Kyurei-Hime to travel beyond the borders, trying out foreign delights and making strong political connections with neighboring powers.

Bonds. He cares deeply for the children in the orphanage he established in Tetsu Mikazuchi. He believes the orphanage will be shut down if he were to lose favor in the court.

The Rebel: Kikumonji Monjiro

The son of Blindsmith Ichi and a passionate leader of the Steel Horizons labor union. He has a great displeasure towards the Tetsuzo clan, and sees the current state of Tetsukamichi as their failure in leadership.

Personality Traits. Charismatic, rough, and passionate.

Recent History. He recently crafted a powerful weapon using his father's designs. He intends to wield it as a symbol of his rebellion.

Bonds. He fears for his father's safety.

The Scion: Tetsuzo Kyurei-Hime

The aasimar daughter of the Tetsuzo clan's sovereign. She is a vibrant individual who's loved by the people, although her future in the clans is suspect due to her lack of smithing proficiency.

Personality Traits. Compassionate, kind, and eloquent.

Recent History. She recently traveled to several neighboring nations to gather an army to help quell the Necromaw problem.

Bonds. She is loyal to her people and would die for them

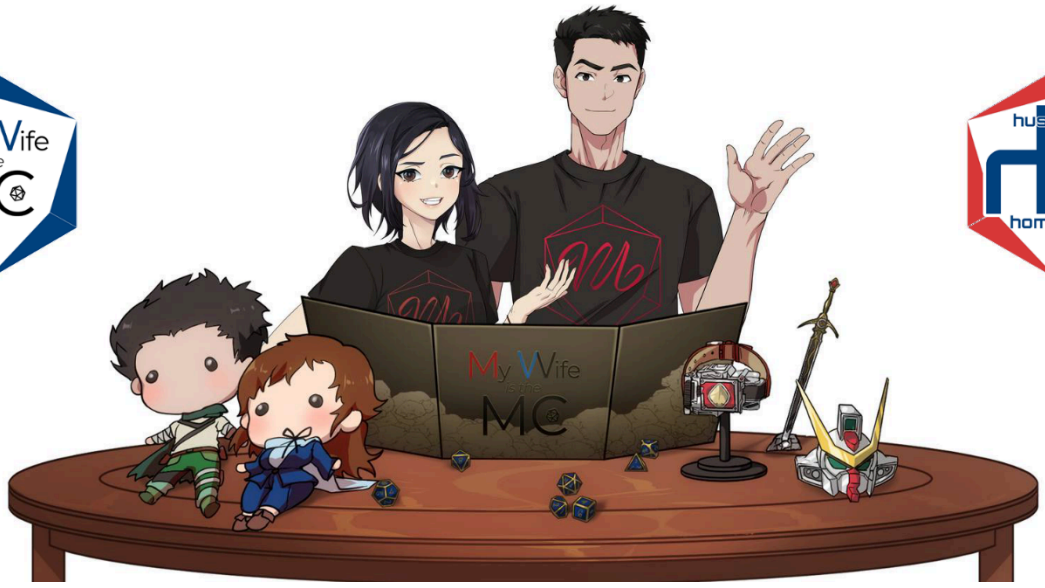
Dungeon Jam Credits



This adventure is my entry to the Dungeontuber's Dungeon Jam held in May 2025. The event was organized by AB and Dadi from Mystic Arts, Knigobi, Pablo from Lunatic Dice, and Tanner from PaladinProse.

Special thanks to Anton from Emergent GM for the Dungeon Jam logo, and Johnn Four from Role Playing Tips Publishing for codifying and popularizing the 5 Room Dungeon concept!

Please check out the other entries for **Dungeon Jam 2025**!



About My Wife is the MC

My Wife is the MC is a YouTube channel run by DM V, who creates homebrew content that translates characters from popular media into narratively themed 5e mechanics. This includes creating classes, subclasses, and magic items, or even putting homebrewed characters from various anime, movies, or video game titles into the 5e versions of their settings. By homebrewing content with the source material as a priority, we aim to capture how a pop culture character feels for any player who wants to take their favorite characters to a gaming table, all while keeping within the system's boundaries.
DM V also runs single-player campaigns with his wife, who plays the channel's titular MC.