Chapter 6:
Steading of the Iron King

It started a month ago. A robot rolled down from the foothills to the village edge. The Ancient device buzzed and blinked, then blew up.

The same thing happened the next day, and the next, and almost every day since. However, on at least four occasions, a robot succeeded in reaching the village periphery, buzzed, blinked, and fired a rocket at the wall (without much effect).

What the heck is going on up in the foothills?

“Steading of the Iron King” is a D&D Gamma World adventure for five 1st-level characters.

Background

If the characters decide to investigate the source of the oddly behaving robots, they can learn the following information with a successful skill check.

Conspiracy or Interaction DC 9: A group of badders have a steading, or fort, up in the foothills. The mutated humanoid badgers are cruel and violent, and have raided the village and other nearby communities in past years. However, badders aren’t known for their ability to program robots.

Conspiracy or Interaction DC 13: About five years back, a contingent of the cryptic alliance known as Archivists visited the village. The Archivists stayed only a few days but asked many questions about robots: Had anyone in the village ever seen active ones, found any old ruins up in the foothills containing robots, and so on. The villagers answered “no” to all these questions.

Conspiracy or Science DC 17: The villagers have been hauling the pieces of blown-up robots into a growing scrap pile outside the wall. A look through the detritus reveals that some of the bits have Ancient letters stamped on them: StupendiCo Security. StupendiCo is supposedly the name of an Ancient cryptic alliance renowned for creating all manner of wonderful yet dangerous technology.

The Real Story

Badders do have a steading in the hills, but they are not responsible for the rash of robots, although they are involved.

The Archivists who showed up five years ago had an old map detailing various installations of the Ancients, including one labeled “StupendiCo Defense Robots.” Their questions, intended to narrow down the likely location of the site, also piqued the interest of a particularly intelligent and deranged hoop. It hired a band of mercenaries and followed the group.

When the Archivists discovered the site, buried and forgotten beneath a badder steading, the hoop mastermind, along with its mercenaries, allied with the badders and killed the explorers. Then it began playing with all the buzzing, blinking toys it found in the forgotten installation.
ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Characters who backtrack the rudely behaving robots to their source discover a badder steading—a sturdy stone tower built over a large underground warren. Determined adventurers can force their way into the steading, penetrate the tunnels beneath, and ultimately find the entrance to the buried installation from which the robots emerge.

The subterranean installation is partly controlled by the hoop mastermind calling itself the Iron King and defended by its warriors and mercenaries. However, some of the installation remains outside the hoop’s control. Its attempts to master the computer-controlled installation accidentally initiated the automated robot manufactory, which began spitting out defense bots of imperfect design. Rather than deal with the potentially dangerous automatons, the hoop funnels each day’s newly created robot along a path leading out of the installation, and the badders make sure it exits safely.

With perseverance, the adventurers can advance through the installation and defeat the hoop mastermind—assuming they can avoid being dropped in a vat of wild nano.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The characters hear about or witness the robot incursion described at the beginning of this chapter. If they are interested in learning more, they can attempt the skill checks presented in the “Background” section.

Alternatively, one of the characters, new to the village, is on a quest. He or she has inherited a map (perhaps similar to the one the missing Archivists possessed) that describes the location of an Ancient installation filled with powerful technology.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Backtracking the robots through the wilderness isn’t hard to do. The badder steading is in the foothills, about one day’s travel from the village. The wilderness is filled with dangerous mutants and random dangers, keeping the characters on guard, but the trip to the steading occurs without mishap. The characters’ first real brush with danger is as they approach the steading.

DEFECTIVE ROBOTS

Once a day, a buzzing robot emerges from the tower and trundles down the trail toward the village. It ignores the characters unless they attack or try to stop it. In that case, use a shieldbot (page 127), except that the robot’s weapon systems are malfunctioning—it can’t make attacks and explodes when hit. Any creature adjacent to the robot when it explodes takes 5 physical damage.
RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

“Steading of the Iron King” encompasses eight encounters set on four battle maps. Each map is located on one of the two double-sided poster maps that accompany this boxed set. As the characters advance through the adventure, they move through the areas shown on the maps.

After the adventurers enter the steading and make their way to the installation of the Ancients beneath it, the encounters between poster maps are not physically connected. They pass through dozens of interconnected chambers, descend stone or metal stairs, and occasionally find straight connecting passages. These corridors, tunnels, and chambers aren’t shown on the battle maps. You can create a side encounter on a map of your design if you want, though it should be only a brief diversion from the main adventure.

STEADING APPROACH

The tower of the steading is perched on the side of a steep slope. Two encounters take place on this map: S1: Badder Tower Defense and S2: Tower Interior.

STEADING WARRENS

The warrens beneath the tower are a maze of rough chambers and abandoned burrows, encompassing encounters S3: Warren Entry and S4: Moth Infestation. Once the characters enter the final tunnel, they can press on immediately to the final encounters or rest in a side corridor before facing the Iron King.

STUPENDICO PERIMETER

Here the warrens butt up against the walls of the old buried installation. The main entrance to the installation is described in S5: StupendiCo Installation Exterior, and its first chamber in S6: StupendiCo Foyer.

ROBOT MANUFACTORY

Encounter S7: StupendiCo Restricted Area on this map depicts a corridor defended by a laser mesh and some guardbots. Encounter S8: StupendiCo Factory Floor takes place in the heart of the installation. Here, the self-titled Iron King uses its “crown” (a cybernetic control helm) to try to master the installation and ward off intruders into the hoop’s domain.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

The characters can end the robot threat either by defeating the Iron King or by sabotaging the robot assembly pad on the factory floor. They might try to establish themselves as the new overlords of the robot manufactory. If they do, they could end up with more trouble than they can handle: robots in revolt, other greedy hoops, or more teams of “troubleshooters” like themselves. But that’s another story...
CHAPTER 6: STEADING OF THE IRON KING

ENCOUNTER S1: BADDRER TOWER DEFENSE

ENCOUNTER LEVEL 1 (550 XP)

SETUP

2 badder steading guards (B), page 109
2 porker marauders (P), page 126
1 radioactive crater, page 136

The characters approach the badders’ fort, atop a ridge line in the foothills. They must interact with or bypass the tower’s defenders.

When the characters first see the tower, read:

The old trail you discovered while backtracking the robots’ trail skirts a glowing crater. It ends at the base of a rough-hewn stone tower, where badders carrying crossbows stand watch, supported by porkers carrying flails.

The badders warn off the characters. If asked about robots leaving the tower, they disavow any knowledge of such events (a successful DC 13 Insight check reveals that they are lying). They make extravagant claims about their “Iron King,” which they identify as a brilliant hoop wearing a shiny crown, if anyone asks. The badders open fire on anyone who tries to invade, supported by the Iron King’s porker mercenaries.

TACTICS

The steading guards attempt to stay under cover behind boulders and fire their crossbows at foes for as long as possible. The porkers maintain their initial positions during the first round of combat, hoping to lure attackers forward. Once in melee, the porkers use flail to push foes into the radioactive crater, preferably after dazing them with a foul belch.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: At night, torches shed bright light out to 5 squares. The radioactive crater sheds dim light.

Boulders: Scattered across the hillside are 10-foot-high boulders, which are blocking terrain. A creature can climb on top of one with a DC 13 Athletics check.


Ridge Lines: These crumbling rocky outcrops are difficult terrain.

Tower: The windowless tower is 30 feet high, and its stone walls require a DC 17 Athletics check to climb. The only way in at ground level is through the double doors (see below). A hatch in the roof also provides access to the interior and can be unlocked with a DC 17 Mechanics check. Characters can also break through the hatch with a DC 17 Strength check or by dealing 50 physical damage to it (attacks hit automatically).

Double Doors: These reinforced oak doors are barred from the inside. Characters can break them down with a DC 21 Strength check or by dealing 100 physical damage to them.
Once a day, a buzzing robot emerges from the tower and trundles down the trail. The characters can bar the doors or take other steps to stop the robots from emerging, but doing so is a temporary fix; eventually a hoop or a badder lets the robots out again. The only way to permanently stop the incursions is to defeat the Iron King.

**Reward:** Each player draws one Omega Tech card from his or her deck, and the group rolls 1d6 times on the Ancient Junk table (page 81).