

# Wheels Within Wheels

## NOM Adventure 5

### Adventure Overview

*Note: This adventure takes place shortly before the events of the Montaigne Revolution.*

Serk Markstrom, a prominent member of the Swordsman's Guild, and a member of the Council of Thirteen, has put a plan into motion to thwart Alvara Arciniega. Although Serk is not ready to openly defy Arciniega, he is more than willing to interfere with his plans and delay his research. Utilizing his many connections, Markstrom discovered the whereabouts of Stefan, one of the many smugglers Arciniega uses to acquire artifacts, scientific inventions, and alchemical components. He knows that Stefan is driving a caravan of three wagons through the Lockhorn forest of Montaigne, towards the city of Muguet, where the contents of the wagons can be shipped to Arciniega. Markstrom hires the Heroes, through the guise of the Swordsman's Guild, to stop the wagon in the forest, arrest Stefan, and bring the contents of the wagon to the authorities at Muguet. Of course, Arciniega is no fool, and he assigns his personal police force, de Espectro Acero, to keep Markstrom under surveillance. Upon discovering Markstrom's plan, the Espectro Acero are dispatched to deal with the Heroes and protect the caravan.

### The Assignment

If one or more of the Heroes is a Swordsman, bringing them into this adventure will be very easy,

as the Guild will simply broker a commission and offer it to the Hero. He's welcome to refuse, but Markstrom will inflate the price if necessary. Alternately, a Hero might have crossed swords with Stefan earlier in the campaign, and harbour a desire to get even. You might even replace Stefan with another Villain, provided he or she is connected to NOM in some way. The adventure opens with the Heroes



having already been given a contract by the Guild, complete with a rough map of the area, and a description of Stefan. They are told that Stefan is a wanted criminal who specializes in smuggling, and that the caravan contains illegal contraband. The Heroes are paid to find the caravan in the forest, detain the criminal Stefan, and turn over the contraband to the Muguet authorities.

### Scene 1 : Into the Night

The Heroes begin the adventure by entering the forest of Lockhorn on the side closest to Muguet. Smart Heroes will travel on horseback, since the wagon caravan would likely outdistance the Heroes on foot. The information provided by the old indicates they should meet the caravan head-on near the Crossroads of Despair on the fifth day. If the Heroes engage in a forced march, they arrive at the crossroads a day early, and may attempt to stage an ambush. They'll have to hurry, however. Deducing the necessity of a forced march takes a simple Wits check, TN 15.

To heighten tension, play up the foreboding look of the forest, and explain that there have been rumours that those who stray too far into the forest of Lockhorn disappear, never to be seen again. As they enter the forest, the sky seems to disappear, as if the trees swallow them up completely. The trail is framed on both sides by dense underbrush and huge trees whose large overhanging branches effectively block out the sun. It is dark in the forest, and the heroes can hear unidentified noises coming from its depths, and occasional movement within the shadows of the trees. If you wish to add random encounters, roll once during each day, and four times at night. A roll of a 1 on a d10 indicates an encounter.

### Roll 2d10 and consult the chart below.

2 - 5	Boca (pg. 155)
6 - 10	Wolves (pg. 155)
11 - 13	Bear (pg. 155)
14 - 15	Ghoul (pg. 156)
16 - 17	Ghost (pg. 156)
18 - 19	Night Terror (pg. 159)
20	Ruin Monster (pg. 159)

*Page references refer to the GM's Guide book.*

### Scene 2 : A Specter Comes Calling

On the third day in the forest, the Heroes walk into an ambush set by Commandant Miguel of de Espectro Acero, who automatically gains surprise against them. The Brute Squads appear both in front of, and behind the Heroes, effectively cutting off any chance of escape. There is one Brute Squad for every two Heroes, with the following stats:

*Threat Rating:* 4

*Weapons:* Rapier (medium)

*TN to Hit:* 25

*Ambush +1, Stealth +1*

*Special:* These Brutes hail from Castille, and thus roll and keep one extra dice when they attack. Miguel leads one of the Brute Squads personally.

All of them wear dark brown, or black clothing, and have the look of mercenaries. None bear any markings or insignia, which might give the PC's a clue to their identity. If the Heroes are clearly winning the battle, Miguel and his surviving followers retreat into the forest. They are such skilled woodsmen that they are impossible to track or follow. It is imperative that Miguel escapes, as he will return to pester the Heroes later in the adventure. If the Heroes fail, Miguel and his men subdue the Heroes and tie them up. Miguel keeps them in the forest for three days, just enough time to allow the caravan to make it to the docks of Muguet. Then he leaves them in the forest, taking their horses with him. Obviously, if this happens, the mission is a failure. Assuming the Heroes are able to free themselves and return to civilization, the Swordsman's Guild shuns them for not completing the contract. No payment is given and any Swordsman Heroes lose Reputation points equal to their Reputation Rank.

### Scene 3: The Crossroads of Despair

Deep in the forest of Lockhorn, in a small clearing, a trail leading from east to west intersects the larger path running from north to south. These are known as the Crossroads of Despair. In the clearing stand several large trees, scattered few and far between. These trees have shackles nailed to their boughs: a favoured spot for local authorities to leave criminals hanging by their wrists from the branches. By nightfall, according to the legend, the criminals' screams can be heard as far away as Muguet as the creatures of the night feast on their warm bodies. A few human bones can be seen scattered here and there as the Heroes approach the clearing. All manner of animal tracks can be seen around the trees, and particularly, observant Heroes may find several unidentifiable tracks which are at least as large as a bear.



Unless the Heroes engage in a forced march, they arrive at the Crossroads on the morning of the fifth day. Despite their efforts, they do not have time to stage an ambush; the caravan scouts spot them from a distance and prepare their forces for trouble. Stefan stays with the caravan and orders his forces into strategic positions to defend the wagons. One Brute Squad rides out to the Heroes to discuss their intentions. The Brutes offer the Heroes a bribe: one thousand guilders each if they simply ride away, and do not attempt to hinder the caravan. Of course, the Heroes should refuse this offer, leaving the Brutes with nothing to do except rerun to the caravan.

There are a total of three wagons, each protected by three Brute Squads, for a grand total of nine Brute Squads. One squad remains in or on each wagon and attacks the Heroes with firearms. The remaining six squads remain on the ground with weapons drawn, and mill close into melee with any Heroes who approach. Stefan leads one of the Brute Squads on the first wagon, and fires both of his pistols at the Heroes before taking out his axe and leaping into the fray, taking charge of the Brute Squads on the ground. The Brutes have the following stats:

*Threat Rating:* 2

*Weapons:* Rapiers (medium) Pistols (firearms)

*TN to Hit:* 15

*Footwork* +1

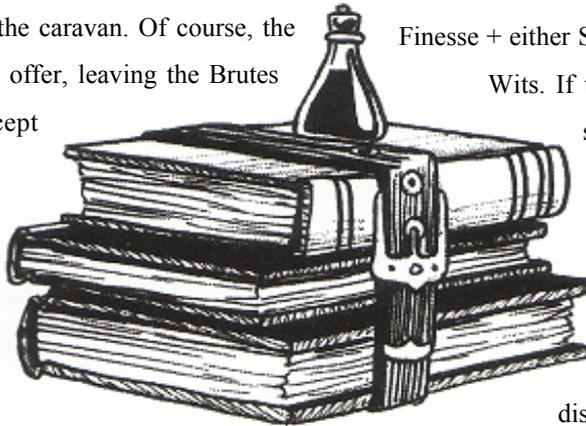
*Special:* These Brutes are Montaigne mercenaries and have one additional attack per round. They are being paid very well, but only receive it upon reaching the docks of Muguet safely. Thus, they will fight to the death to protect the caravan.

### Forced March

If the Heroes engage in a forced march, they arrive at the crossroads on the morning of the fourth day, and have plenty of time to stage their ambush. However, a forced march leaves the horses exhausted, and they need at least one day's rest before they can be ridden again. One Hero may roll for the entire party, indicating that he has taken control of the ambush preparations, and knows where to position the other

Heroes. He must make a contested roll of his Finesse + either Stealth or Ambush vs. Stefan's Wits. If the Hero wins, then he gains

surprise on the caravan when it approaches the next morning. The Heroes gain a free attack for one phase, during which time those protecting the caravan are disorganized and unable to act.



Even if the Ambush attempt fails, Stefan does not have the time to rally the troops for a proper defence, leaving them disorganized and confused. They take to the ground and fight with their rapiers. Stefan stays on the lead wagon, defending it with his pistols. Once half of the Brute Squads have been defeated, Stefan flees into the forest on foot. Any Heroes not under attack may chase him, but have to do so on foot; the horses are too tired to run. Use the Chase rules on page 169-172 of the GMs' Guide to conduct the chase. As Stefan and the Hero flee deeper into the wood, roll a d10 for each round that passes. A roll of 1 indicates a random encounter, which may give Stefan the chance he needs to escape. On the other hand, Stefan is just as much of a target as the Hero, and may find himself another victim of the Lockhorn Forest.

### The Spoils

Whether the Heroes capture Stefan or not, they have full access to the wagon caravan once the Brutes are defeated. The First wagon contains building supplies... rope, lumber, iron, and other gear. A careful search reveals several manuscripts concealed at the bottom of a footlocker containing blankets. The manuscripts, bearing the seal of the Invisible College, are illegible to anyone who doesn't have at least a Rank 4 in the Astronomy Knack. If the Heroes can read it, all they can make out is the possibility of several new discoveries of stellar phenomena along with co-ordinates in the night sky.

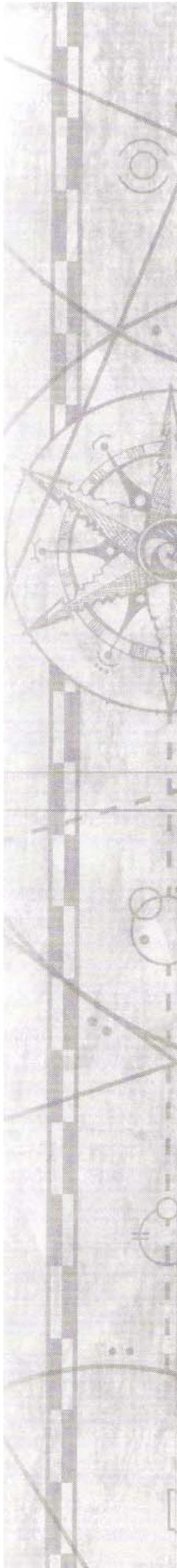
The second wagon contains food, water, and other supplies necessary for the trip. If the wagon is searched well, the Heroes find a small wooden case containing rack upon rack of corked vials. The vials contain a variety of powders, each a different colour. Any Heroes with a Rank of 3 or higher in the Natural Philosophy Knack can discern that the powders are components used in alchemical research. The final wagon contains crates full of weapons, and raw goods. If all of the crates are opened, the Heroes find a man, bound and gagged, inside one of them. He is young, dressed like a beggar and smelling of alcohol. Once released, he thanks the Heroes sincerely, introducing himself as Paddy O'Brien, the ruler of Dreenan County Inismore. He promises them riches beyond their mildest dreams if they take him home. When asked why he was abducted, he says he overheard Stefan saying something about milking him of his blood. If there are any female Heroes, he makes a pass at one of them, and has a hard time keeping his hands to himself. For the rest of the adventure, Paddy continually prattles on about his romantic interludes, and inundates the Heroes with gossip concerning members of the Avalonian court.

Any heroes willing to share their alcohol find that Paddy becomes their new best friend, at least until the whiskey is gone.

### Scene 4: Once More Into the Breach

Now that the Heroes have the wagons, and hopefully Stefan as well, their next step is to deliver them to the authorities at Muguet, another two-day journey. Unbeknownst to the Heroes, Commandant Miguel regrouped, and followed the Heroes, waiting for the perfect time to strike. On the first night after the Heroes confiscate the caravan, Miguel makes his move. Hopefully, the Heroes placed a sentry or two to watch over the camp during the night otherwise they are doomed. Miguel attempts to ambush any sentries who are awake, making a contested roll of Miguel's Finesse + Stealth vs. the sentry's Wits + Ambush. If Miguel succeeds, he gains surprise on the sentry for one phase, and attacks alone. If Miguel fails, he openly attacks with two Brute Squads (see earlier stats), while a third attacks the Heroes with firearms from the trees.

Once the first Brute Squad is defeated, Miguel asks for a truce in order to discuss business. If the Heroes accept, he orders his men to stand down, and he steps forward alone. Miguel then takes the scarf off of his face, revealing the young man's handsome features, and rugged demeanour. He says the following: "There is no need to fight over this gentleman. I know you have been paid to acquire contraband and deliver it to the authorities. I have a counter proposal. The beggar, is most certainly not contraband. I will allow you to keep the wagons, and anything found within... if you will turn the beggar over to me. To sweeten the deal, I will throw in 500 guilders for each of you. You have my word: give me the beggar and we will leave you



to your own devices."

The Heroes are free to accept Miguel's deal if they wish. After all, the beggar isn't contraband, and with the wagons, they can still complete their contract. Of course, it isn't a very heroic thing to do, and the GM may impose a loss of Reputation if he sees fit.

If the Heroes refuse the offer, Miguel and his men continue to attack. If two or more Brute Squads are defeated, Miguel flees and returns to Alvara to report the situation.

If no sentries are posted, Miguel and his men tie up the sleeping Heroes, retake the caravan, and recapture Paddy O'Brien. Of course, this means that the adventure is over, and the Heroes failed. Miguel and his men take the heroes to the Crossroads of Despair and shackle them into the trees. It is unlikely that any Heroes left in this fashion will survive the night, but Miguel cannot be persuaded otherwise. If Stefan escaped into the forest in Scene Three, you may have him reappear and free the Heroes (he is skilled at picking locks), assuming they give him their word that they will let him leave in peace. Once they return, no payment will be honoured by the Guild, and any Swordsman Heroes lose Reputation points equal to their Reputation Rank.

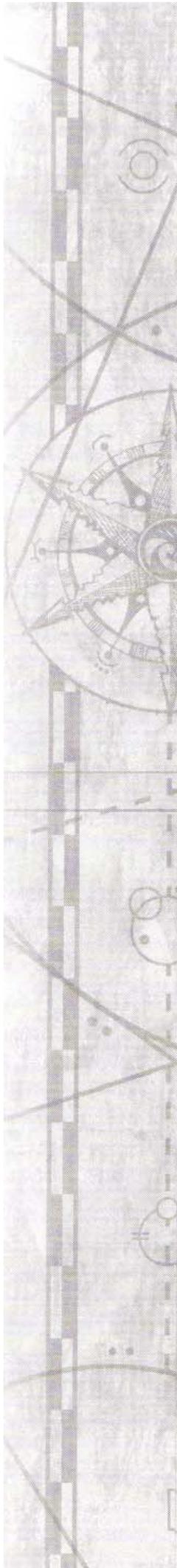
### **Aftermath**

If Stefan escapes into the forest, he goes straight for Muguet where he tips off the authorities that a caravan containing contraband is heading their way. Once the Heroes arrive, they are arrested by the Constable, and are held until the Duke d'Aur himself sees fit to interrogate them. The Duke holds them for three days, asking them over and over where they got the Invisible College manuscripts. He does not

believe their story about working for the Guild, and in a furious rage, he schedules them to hang on the following morning. The GM should play up the tension surrounding the hanging, complete with jeering crowds and thrown garbage as the Heroes make their walk of shame from the jail to the gallows. Just as the nooses are placed around their necks, an entourage of men ride into the city, bearing the seal of the Swordsman's Guild. After some explaining on the Guild's behalf, the Heroes are free to go. Alternately, you may allow the Heroes to conceive and execute any escape plans they wish, without giving the Duke time to hang them.

Once the Heroes turn over the contraband to the authorities, they can collect their reward. Serk Markstrom believes the Heroes may come in handy for future endeavours where expendable personnel are needed.

If the Heroes take Paddy O'Brien home, they are greeted by his grateful father, Geal O'Brien, the true ruler of Dreenan County. He prepares a huge feast in their honour, which lasts for three days. During that time the Heroes are treated like kings. They are given the best cuts of meat, all the ale they can drink, and the most beautiful Jennies available share their company. On the fourth day, the O'Brien calls for a ceremony where he can properly thank his son's benefactors. The Heroes are ritualistically bathed, their hair braided, and their bodies clothed in colourful robes. At dawn they are led from the castle, out into the surrounding countryside to a stone circle. Waiting within the circle is a tall man, wearing a brown robe and holding a large knotted walking stick. The man is a druid, and one of the O'Brien's many sons. Each Hero steps into the circle in turn, where the druid speaks to him in an unknown



language, then blows smoke into his face. When the Hero leaves the circle, he finds himself blessed with a lesser Gesa.

*Reprinted from Avalon*

### **Gesa ( Advantage )**

Gesa are powerful spells cast on Heroes. Only Heroes and Villains may have Gesa; Henchmen and Brutes are not eligible. The number of points depends on the Gesa cast; Lesser Gesa require 3 points, while Greater Gesa require 5. The Gesa binds the Hero to a simple rule.

*Sample Lesser Gesa:*

*Must never remove their boots*

*Must keep his head shaved*

*Must not give his name to strangers*

*Must never refuse a demand from a lady*

For each Lesser Gesa a Hero still has in effect at the end of a Story, he receives 1 XP. When a Hero breaks a Lesser Gesa, any XP he may have received from that Gesa at the end of the Story is lost. In addition, new Gesa may not be placed on the Hero until the beginning of the next Story.

## Important NPCs

### **Commandant Miguel**

*Brawn 3, Finesse 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Panache 3*

*Arcana:* Exemplary

*Advantages:* Castille (R/W) Théan (R/W) Combat Reflexes, Keen Senses, Membership (NOM), Membership (de Espectro Acero), Patron (Arciniega)

*Athlete:* Climbing 4, Footwork 4, Sprint 3, Throwing 2

*Aldana (Journeyman):* Feint (Fencing) 5, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 4, Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4

*Courtier:* Dancing 3, Diplomacy 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 2, Oratory 2, Politics 2

*Fencing:* Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 4

*Hunter:* Ambush 4, Stealth 4, Survival 4, Tracking 4

*Spy:* Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Hand Signs 2, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Commandant Miguel is one of the officers in Arciniega's hand picked Council Police force known as de Espectro Acero (The Steel Specters). As a Commandant, Miguel is authorized to speak on Arciniega's behalf in his absence, and holds other such important duties. Originally Miguel Arciniega de Montoya, Alvara chose him for his outstanding tracking skills and exemplary leadership capabilities. Miguel will pursue the PCs to the best of his ability, and stop them if he is able. He is not stupid, however, and will not fight to the death if things go badly. Someone needs to survive to inform Alvara of the situation. Miguel dresses entirely in black leather, reminiscent of Vodacce nobleman, and wears a long black scarf around his face.

### **Stefan, Master of the Caravan**

*Brawn 3, Finesse 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Panache 3*

*Arcana:* Righteous

*Advantages:* Eisen (R/W), Théan (R/W), Dracheneisen (Breastplate), Membership (NOM), Patron (Arciniega)

*Criminal:* Gambling 2, Lockpicking 4, Pickpocket 4, Quack 1, Shadowing 4, Stealth 3

*Firearms:* Attack (Firearms) 4, Reload (Firearms) 3

*Heavy Weapon:* Attack (Heavy Weapon) 4, Parry (Heavy Weapon) 4

*Servant:* Drive Carriage 3, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Gossip 4, Menial Tasks 4, Unobtrusive 5

*Spy:* Bribery 4, Conceal 5, Disguise 4, Forgery 4, Shadowing 4, Sincerity 5, Stealth 3

*Streetwise:* Scrounging 4, Shopping 5, Socialization 3, Street Navigation 3, Underworld Lore 5

Stefan is one of NOM's many field agents, specializing in acquisition and smuggling. Arciniega often utilizes him for smuggling artifacts, and scientific discoveries. Born an Eisen, Stefan grew up in the mean streets of Freiburg. Although he inherited his dracheneisen from his father, their lands had long ago been seized during the war, leaving Stefan with

only his wits to survive.

Stefan is a middle-aged man with a bald pate and no facial hair. In battle, he fires his pistols first, then pulls out his axe and close into melee. If captured, he will not give up any information concerning his mission under any circumstances. Anyone who attacks Stefan suffers a damage penalty of -1 Kept dice due to his armour.

### **Paddy O'Brien**

*Brawn* 2, *Finesse* 3, *Wits* 3, *Resolve* 3, *Panache* 2

*Arcana*: Hedonistic

*Advantages*: Avalon (R/W) Théan (R/W), Able Drinker, Noble

*Courtier*: Dancing 5, Etiquette 2, Fashion 4, Gossip 4, Mooch 5, Oratory 3, Seduction 4

*Fencing*: Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 2

*Glamour* (Apprentice): The Horned Hunter 3, Anne o' the Wind 3, Jack 3, The Green Man 2, Thomas 2

Paddy O'Brien is the fourth son of Gael O'Brien, ruler of Dreenan County Inismore. Although he comes from a powerful family, Paddy spends his time drinking, dancing, and gossiping with other nobles. He loves to travel from county to county, visiting noble families and having a grand time at their expense. Paddy is little help in a combat situation and will flee and hide rather than fight. He will, however, use his Glamour to defend himself if necessary. Paddy has been dressed as a beggar, but his smooth young face and luxurious long hair stand out starkly against the rags he wears.



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