

Ahead on the rough road, a pair of dead horses and an overturned cart block your way. Sacks and barrels spilled from the cart litter the ground. Trees grow close to the road here, and the thick undergrowth obscures the view beyond.

As the characters approach within 50 feet, any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that several goblins stand motionless in the underbrush, while several more perch in the trees. A character who succeeds on the check by 5 or more also notices that these goblins are dead, as does any character who attacks or attempts to interact with them. A closer investigation then reveals that they have been propped up and tied into their positions.

Creatures. The two dead horses are **warhorse skeletons** whose remaining flesh sloughs off as they fight. When any character comes within 20 feet of the fallen horses, these undead lurch to their feet and attack. When this happens, each character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or be surprised.

Tactics. The gnome archmage Hoobur Gran'Shoop animated these dead horses in the aftermath of the attack on Tresendar Manor, commanding them to lie still and attack any humanoid creatures that approach them.

Hoobur's Mark. If the characters poke around the rotting flesh that fell off the horses during the battle, they see that each horse bore scars on its sides that form

the image of a draconic skull with a sword driven up through it from the bottom. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the sigil as part of a unique necromantic ritual that can turn any creature into an undead creature when it dies. (The characters will see this rune and this magic again later. See the sidebar "The Magic of Convenience" on the next page for more information.)

Treasure. Most of the crates, sacks, and barrels that litter the road and the wagon have already been emptied of valuables. One cask of Luskan Ice Mead remains intact among the looted goods, worth 50 gp in Phandalin. Alternatively, the characters can get 200 gp for it in Waterdeep, where patrons won't realize that ice mead is just normal mead in Luskan.

ARRIVAL IN PHANDALIN

After a harrowing and potentially lucrative journey, the characters arrive in Phandalin. Map 2.1 shows the layout of the small town, with key locations described in the sections below.

Read or paraphrase the following to set the scene:

This modest-sized town is comprised of some fifty buildings, most of which show signs of regular upkeep. Farms and an apple orchard mark the outer edge of town, with houses and shops closer in. Townsfolk are milling about in the central square and on the adjacent green. Two people stand on a stage on the green, addressing the crowd, but the distance to them—along with a steady chorus of cheers, boos, and shouts—obscures what's being said.

Rising from a small hill overlooking the town is an old manor house—or at least it was an old manor house. Most of its walls have collapsed in what appears to be a recent disaster, with traces of smoke still rising from piles of tumbled stone.

When the characters approach the stage or try to slip away, continue:

A portly, well-dressed male human on the stage points unexpectedly at your group and shouts. "You see? This is exactly what I mean! Just when things start to calm down in Phandalin, more murderous vagrants show up. They probably have something to do with what's happened to Tresendar Manor, and with the livestock that have started going missing! And it's only a matter of time before this all ends in misery and bloodshed, I promise you!"

Politics in Phandalin. Phandalin was long run by an elected townmaster, until trouble with bandits some years ago saw the townmaster replaced by a council of three prominent citizens, elected every two years. However, the recent abdication of one councilor and the town's growing size have prompted the townsfolk to decide that it's time to expand the council to five persons,

