

PH'THEEV, THE DESPONDENT

Part One of the Psionic Menace Series

A new trend is sweeping through the upper crust of Hillsfar nobility. Private menageries—the more exotic the better—have begun popping up in mansions and gardens around the city. However, recent reports of dangerous monsters escaping captivity and attacking citizens have the Red Plumes concerned. Where are these monsters coming from, how are they being procured, and what threat might this pose?

A Four-Hour Adventure for 1st–4th Level Characters



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Ph'theev, The Despondent*, a D&D Adventurers League™ adventure, part of the official D&D Adventurers League™ organized play system and The Role Initiative's *Psionic Menace* series.

This adventure takes place outside the city of Hillsfar, at a mansion near the town of Yûlash, and in a cavern complex beneath the mansion.

This adventure is designed for **three to seven 1st–4th level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 3**. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure.

ADJUSTING THIS ADVENTURE

This adventure provides suggestions in making adjustments for smaller or larger groups, characters of higher or lower levels, and characters that are otherwise a bit more powerful than the adventure is optimized for. You're not bound to these adjustments; they're here for your convenience.

To figure out whether you should consider adjusting the adventure, add up the total levels of all the characters and divide the total by the number of characters (rounding .5 or greater up; .4 or less down). This is the group's APL. To approximate the **party strength** for the adventure, consult the following table.

DETERMINING PARTY STRENGTH

Party Composition Party	Strength
3–4 characters, APL less than	Very weak
3–4 characters, APL equivalent	Weak
3–4 characters, APL greater than	Average
5 characters, APL less than	Weak
5 characters, APL equivalent	Average
5 characters, APL greater than	Strong
6–7 characters, APL less than	Average
6–7 characters, APL equivalent	Strong
6–7 characters, APL greater than	Very strong

Some encounters may include a sidebar that offers suggestions for certain party strengths. If a particular recommendation is not offered or appropriate for your group, you don't have to make adjustments.

BEFORE PLAY AT THE TABLE

Before you start play, consider the following:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you'd like to highlight or remind yourself of while running the adventure, such as a way you'd like to portray an NPC or a tactic you'd like to use in a combat. Familiarize yourself with the adventure's appendices and handouts.
- Gather any resources you'd like to use to aid you in running this adventure—such as note cards, a DM screen, miniatures, and battlemaps.
- Ask the players to provide you with relevant character information, such as name, race, class, and level; passive Wisdom (Perception), and anything specified as notable by the adventure (such as backgrounds, traits, flaws, etc.)

PLAYING THE DUNGEON MASTER

You have the most important role—facilitating the enjoyment of the game for the players. You provide the narrative and bring the words on these pages to life.

To facilitate this, keep in mind the following:

You're Empowered. Make decisions about how the group interacts with the adventure; adjusting or improvising is encouraged, so long as you maintain the adventure's spirit. This doesn't allow you to implement house rules or change those of the Adventurers League, however; they should be consistent in this regard.

Challenge Your Players. Gauge the experience level of your **players** (not the characters), try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to deliver the experience they're after. Everyone should have the opportunity to shine.

Keep the Adventure Moving. When the game starts to get bogged down, feel free to provide hints and clues to your players so they can attempt to solve puzzles, engage in combat, and roleplay interactions without getting too frustrated over a lack of information. This gives players "little victories" for figuring out good choices from clues. Watch for stalling—play loses momentum when this happens. At the same time, make sure that the players don't finish too early; provide them with a full play experience.

ADVENTURE PRIMER

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Recent events in Hillsfar have given a few unscrupulous individuals inspiration for an intriguing new business model. Rich citizens are still buzzing with curiosity at muddled reports of strange, exotic creatures bubbling up from the Underdark in the wake of the recent turmoil deep beneath the earth. It's since become something of a trend for nobles to keep a few living curiosities in private collections, as outward displays of both affluence and influence.

Seizing on this fashionable new trend, a member of the Mages Guild named Nicodemus Finn has allied with a noblewoman named Jaera Rathar and a smuggler named Threnn in order to make some easy coin. Operating out of an abandoned mansion near Yûlash, Nicodemus has created an elaborate series of teleportation circles that link from Yûlash to locations around Faerûn. Threnn's operatives work on both sides of these circles, capturing exotic creatures and transporting them back to be sold at a private auction, run from the mansion above. Jaera's part is to organize the auction, using her contacts in Hillsfar's high society to attract individuals who possess far more money than sense.

The auctions have been a hit, and several nobles can now boast ownership of creatures from such far-flung places as Chult, the Desert of Mulhorand, and the Spine of the World. Most recently, however, Nicodemus has opened up a circle to the Underdark, and with it has exposed the operation to a dark, psionic influence. The past few auctions have featured dangerous monstrosities captured and brought in by Threnn's compromised workers. These, in turn, have been bought by naïve citizens, only to inevitably turn on their new owners and escape into Hillsfar.

Reports of citizens butchered by these monstrosities have caught the ear of Red Plume Commandant Vuhm Yestral, and he has personally assigned Sergeant Alder Ridout to investigate the cause. Days later, Sergeant Ridout has discovered the existence of the auction, but not its location or the means by which the creatures are being brought from so far away. Frustrated at the lack of leads, he has ordered a detailed search of all traffic coming into and leaving Hillsfar, hoping to catch the smugglers red-handed.

LOCATION AND NPC SUMMARY

The following locations and NPCs feature prominently in this adventure.

Hillsfar (HILLS-far). A city on the Moonsea.

Yûlash (YOO-lash). An abandoned town near Hillsfar, once home to an extensive network of underground tunnels and caverns.

Jaera Rathar (JAY-ruh ra-THAR). A noblewoman from Hillsfar, and the organizer of the black-market auctions.

Nicodemus Finn (nick-oh-DEE-mus FIN). A member of the Mages Guild of Hillsfar, and the architect of the smuggling operation.

Threnn (THREN). A mysterious and well-connected smuggler with ties to the criminal underworld worldwide, and the organizer of the smuggling operation.

Sergeant Alder Ridout (ALL-der RIDE-out). Sergeant of the Red Plumes, and head of the investigation into the smuggling operation.

Ph'theev (FUH-theev). A flumph, kidnapped from his cloister while on a mission of great importance.

Fillon Thatcher (FILL-on THA-cher). A commoner working as a servant at the auctions, who has his suspicions about the operation.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The characters begin the adventure waiting in a traffic jam of trade wagons that are lined up at the Hillsfar Gate. Red Plume guards are searching each wagon passing through the city gate, demanding papers and inspecting the goods being transported.

Part 1. Papers, Please—45 minutes. An altercation at the front of the line draws the characters' attention. After a fight against some vicious cargo, the characters are debriefed by a Sergeant of the Red Plumes, who enlists their help in an operation against a local smuggling ring based in Yûlash.

Part 2. Going Once, Going Twice—90 minutes. Tasked with uncovering the secrets of the smuggling operation, the characters attend a lavish auction at a remote mansion. Whether they attempt to explore the mansion or simply participate in the auction, they learn of a dangerous, maddening influence that has been spreading from the smugglers' den beneath their feet. Characters also meet a flumph named Ph'theev, who begs for their help in returning home.

Part 3. Containment Breach—60 minutes. The characters press on into the complex, heading beneath the mansion only to find it in a state of complete chaos with dangerous monsters roaming the caverns. They learn that the madness has infected the leaders of the smuggling operation.

Part 4. The Mouth of Madness—45 minutes. The characters reach the source of the maddening influence—a chamber with a teleportation circle linked to the Underdark—and must find a way to

halt the corruption's spread. They are attacked by one of the founders of the smuggling organization, who has long since been driven insane.

Upon completion of their task, characters can send word to Hillsfar and are rewarded for their service by the Red Plume Sergeant. Ph'theev begs the party for their further assistance in travelling to the Underdark to deal with the source of the corruption.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Escort Duty. Despite its unfriendliness towards non-humans, Hillsfar is a major trading site, and there is no shortage of merchants looking for an armed escort. It's not the most glamorous job, but the promised pay—20 gp per character—is decent. Characters may also be drawn to Hillsfar by rumors of its proximity to the recent demonic activity in the Underdark.

Harpers (Faction Assignment). Rumors have reached the faction of an innocent flumph that has been captured by a smuggling ring in Hillsfar. Any Harper agents in the area should keep their eyes open for an opportunity to rescue this creature and return it to its cloister—they might prove a valuable ally, given their psionic abilities.

Emerald Enclave (Faction Assignment). Reports of monstrous activity in Hillsfar have the Emerald Enclave concerned. Given the city's association with the recent demonic activity in the Underdark, they are worried that any resurgence could spill out into the world at large. Agents near Hillsfar are asked to look for anybody who might be able to explain why monsters are roaming the city's streets—the Enclave is willing to offer asylum if necessary.

PART 1. PAPERS, PLEASE

Estimated Duration: 45 minutes

GENERAL FEATURES

The area outside Hillsfar has the following general features.

Terrain. The road is 20 ft. wide and well-paved, but choked with a winding line of carts and animals, forcing characters to either move around, or clamber over the obstructions.

Open fields of grass stretch out on either side of the road, providing neither cover nor hindrance.

Weather. A calm clear morning.

Light. Daylight.

Smells and Sounds. A clear, crisp morning tinged with the faint musky smells of horses, oxen, and people.

1. THE HILLSFAR GATE

A rigorous security check is being performed by the Red Plumes on all persons and items entering the city. The time needed to thoroughly search each entrant has caused a backlog of traffic that extends 80 feet from the gate itself.

Wisps of mist are evaporating under the morning sun in the fields on either side of the road into the city, and looming up in the distance you can see the Hillsfar Gate. It might be a welcome sight, if you hadn't already been staring at it for thirty minutes. Despite the early hour, a long line of wagons, carts, and the occasional carriage stretches out from the entrance to Hillsfar. The traffic creeps forward at a snail's pace, and you can hear the sounds of grumbling merchants and agitated beasts carrying across the still, cool air.

As the characters approach the end of the line, the person driving their wagon—a wiry human woman named Ayla Naysmith—leans to the side and harrumphs. She calls the characters over and asks them to investigate the source of the delay.

“Nine hells, this lot could take hours to pass. I've got goods that'll spoil if that sun climbs too high. Head on up and see if you can't figure out what's taking so long, would you?”

The assorted traffic mostly stays near the center of the road, leaving 5 feet clear on either side. As the characters approach the front of the line, they hear voices raised in anger, and upon closer inspection see a middle-aged human man arguing loudly with the Red Plumes manning the checkpoint:

Over the general din of nervous animals and irritated humanity, a gruff voice can be heard.

“Oi know moi roights, ye brigands!”

A portly man sits at the front of a wagon, two Red Plume guards on either side of him. A third, wearing the insignia of a sergeant, stands in front of the wagon

with a tired look on his face and a practiced hand on the hilt of the sword at his side.

“Citizen, I will say this once more. Commandant Yestrel himself has ordered that all goods and vehicles entering Hillsfar be thoroughly searched for inhuman infiltrators. Your rights under the Great Law of Trade are temporarily suspended during this time of emergency...”

The sergeant's weary tone suggests he has given this speech several times already. He is cut off before he can continue, however, as the two guards accompanying him begin to move towards the back of the wagon. At this, the man driving the wagon looks alarmed and begins yelling more loudly:

“GET BACK! Fer the love of the mother below, if ye know what's good for ye—Oi've got powerful friends, and Oi'll see ye hanged if ye so much as touch that lock!”

The man's pleas fall on deaf ears as the two Red Plume guards force open the lock that is keeping the back of the wagon closed. As they do, the man leaps from his bench and attempts to flee through the Hillsfar Gate, with the sergeant giving chase.

The wagon's back door swings open with a heavy thud. For a moment, there is no reaction, but as the Red Plume guards peer inside, a sudden snarling sound erupts and a massive, two-headed dog bursts from the inner recesses of the cart. It leaps onto one of the guards and begins to savage him.

The hot metallic scent of blood fills the morning air.

Death dogs have been secured within the wagon and magically subdued. When the guards break the door open without the proper key, the magical wards are broken and the occupants awaken, immediately attacking the closest living beings in a bloodthirsty rage.

SETTING UP THE ENCOUNTER

Very Weak

- **Death Dog:** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

Weak

- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

Average

- **Death Dog (3):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

Strong

- **Death Dog (4):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

Very Strong

- **Death Dog (3):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2
- **Hell Hound:** AC 15, 45 hp, Init +1

Panic spreads quickly along the line of merchants as horses panic in their reins, and the death dogs

move on from their kill to continue the slaughter. In a matter of moments, the characters find themselves face-to-face with the creatures, surrounded by a mob of people attempting to flee the scene of carnage.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Tactics. The death dogs are feral monstrosities that have been tainted by the madness spreading from the Underdark. For the first two rounds of combat, they may ignore characters to maul nearby pack animals and go after NPCs who are running away. After this, they single-mindedly attack the last character to deal them damage. If that character falls unconscious, the death dogs leave them alone, preferring to attack more lively prey.

DEVELOPMENT

After the characters successfully defeat the death dogs, the Red Plume guards finally muster a response and begin to move down the line of panicked merchants, restoring some semblance of order. The characters are quickly surrounded by a contingent of guards, who warily level their weapons at the party but make no move to attack. The Red Plume sergeant steps through, takes off his helm, and addresses the characters:

“Well. All things considered, I suppose that could have gone a lot worse. You have my personal thanks—you’ve managed to contain a slaughter, and have helped give us a valuable lead in our investigation.”

The sergeant turns his head and barks a quick order at the assembled guards, who sheath their weapons as one with practiced ease.

“My name is Sergeant Alder Ridout, and if you’ll come with me, perhaps I can offer you something in the way of suitable recompense.”

Sergeant Ridout’s offer is barely distinguishable from an order, and the characters are efficiently escorted by a number of Red Plume guards to a gatehouse set into the city walls. If characters attempt to fight back, they will find themselves outnumbered and easily subdued, only to awaken in custody in the gatehouse.

2. DEBRIEF

Inside the gatehouse you are led to a small, sparsely furnished anteroom and told to wait. It’s some time before anybody follows up with you. In that time, you get the impression of frantic activity happening deeper in the building—the sounds of hurried footsteps, barked orders, and slamming doors all make their way to you. After more than an hour of waiting, the wooden door is thrown open and Sergeant Ridout strides in, flanked by two Red Plume guards. The sergeant has a weary look on his face.

“Right. Before we begin, a few questions.”

The sergeant takes a moment to do a perfunctory interrogation of the characters, asking them to confirm their names, their classes, and that they were hired by Ayla Naysmith as security. If the characters confirm that they were indeed hired by Ayla, he has one of his guards hand over a coin pouch containing their promised pay of 20 gp per character.

ROLEPLAYING SERGEANT RIDOUT

Sergeant Ridout is a middle-aged human male who has risen to a trusted position in the Red Plumes thanks to his keen mind, attention to detail, and investigative prowess. He is direct and gruff towards others, and wastes little time on pleasantries. Though dedicated to upholding the laws of Hillsfar—including the Great Law of Humanity in the past—he does not allow any personal prejudice against non-humans to cloud his professional judgement. He considers himself first and foremost a keeper of the peace, and will go to great lengths to see that order is maintained.

It should be clear to the party that Sergeant Ridout has done his homework and already knows a lot about them. With the opening salvo of questions out of the way, the sergeant takes a seat across from the characters and considers them for a moment.

“I suppose I owe you all an explanation. I’ll start with the facts. Over the past few tendays, there have been a number of deadly attacks within the city limits. Citizens have been found—well, they’ve been mauled. Savaged by monstrosities, some like the ones you fought this morning, others . . . different. We’ve managed to find and put down the offending creatures, but they keep appearing.

“It’s no secret that the upper class of the city enjoy keeping curiosities as pets. Our working theory was that their tastes are becoming a little more extravagant. With today’s incident, we have the proof we need.”

The Sergeant nods to one of the guards, who hands the characters a sheaf of official-looking documents. He explains the following:

- The Red Plumes had been investigating rumors of a black-market auction having been the source of the creatures wreaking havoc. Until today, though, they’ve had no evidence that such a thing even existed—the clientele are exceptionally tight-lipped, even for aristocrats.
- The documents are cargo manifests dating back several months, seized from the driver of the wagon that contained the death dogs. The cargo listed is obviously fraudulent, but the documents have one thing in common—they all list Yúlash as the point of origin.
- In the past hour, Sergeant Ridout has been personally interrogating that same driver. That man

was more than happy to provide a more exact address...eventually.

- The manifests also gave helpful delivery addresses, all of which belong to noted members of high society. The Red Plumes have been busy in the past hour, and each of those people have received personal visits from members of the guard.
- Not only does this rumored auction exist, but it's held semi-regularly at the same address given by the wagon driver—a mansion just outside of Yûlash. Furthermore, the next auction is being held tonight.

Sergeant Ridout collects the manifests back from the characters, and gestures again to the guards, who hand out what look like featureless copper coins, one for each character. To the untrained eye, there's nothing distinctive about them. However, a character attempting a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check (or casting *detect magic*) will sense a faint evocation aura coming from the coins.

“Another fruit of today's labor. I won't name names, but a certain gentleperson kindly volunteered these as evidence. They apparently function as certificates of admission to this auction—anybody carrying one is supposedly vouched for.”

The Sergeant leans forward, takes off his helm, and runs a hand through graying hair. “We have an extremely narrow window of opportunity here. I have no idea if this organization, whatever they are, has already been alerted to this morning's events. But if they don't already know, they will soon. This may be our only chance to infiltrate this auction and find out more. If we play our cards right, we could stamp out this rot tonight.” He takes a deep breath, and looks you all in the eye in turn. “So let me ask you this. How would you all like to attend a high-society auction?”

The Sergeant explains that, while he would prefer to have his own men handle this, they are going to have their hands full. A number of high-profile arrests will be made while the auction is happening, and he's worried that riots will break out when the public realizes that they've been endangered for the sake of aristocratic fancies. Fortunately, the Red Plumes have confiscated enough entry tokens for each of the assembled characters. If the party seems reluctant, Sergeant Ridout implores them further:

“We need your help. I won't pretend that there won't be very real danger involved in this, but I saw you all fight. You know how to handle yourselves. This situation is far from ideal, but as things stand, you are our best and only chance.

“And you will, of course, be handsomely rewarded for your service to Hillsfar.”

If there are any non-human characters in the party, the sergeant adds:

“Let it never be said that the gods don't have a sense of humor. I know that you have little reason to love this city, but the old law is abolished. We're trying to make amends, in our own way. In the meantime, innocents have been killed—and if you're able to help stop further bloodshed, perhaps some citizens might reconsider their attitudes towards your kind.”

Sergeant Ridout offers a total of 200 gp to the party if they are able to infiltrate the auction and take down the smuggling operation. If questioned, he provides the following information:

- Yûlash is—or was—a small town almost a full day's travel to the north of Hillsfar. It has been mostly abandoned for years, so it makes sense that a criminal enterprise might operate there, away from prying eyes.
- Tonight is the best—and last—chance to shatter this organization. Sergeant Ridout wants, at minimum, the identities and locations of the ringleaders. Also, if the characters have an opportunity, they should strike at the hideout tonight, before the organization can go to ground and disappear.
- Once the characters have reached Yûlash, they're on their own. There will be no time to journey back to Hillsfar for backup—in the hours it will take to complete the journey, their lead may vanish.
- The Red Plumes know that the tokens will get them in the front door, but have little intelligence beyond that. The sergeant therefore recommends discretion, at first. Get the lay of the land, be on the lookout for potential informants, and find out what they're dealing with before they draw steel.
- The auction is not exclusive to Hillsfar nobility, so the presence of non-humans should not present an issue.
- The auction waits for all guests to arrive. If the characters make haste, there will likely be time to break away from the crowd and gather information from the mansion before the auction begins.
- Alternatively, participating in the auction itself might provide an opportunity to meet the ringleaders face-to-face. Winners are apparently taken aside to settle their account with the auctioneer—this could prove a valuable opportunity to find their hideout.
- The Red Plumes are able to spare 350 gp for characters to use at auction. This, the sergeant cautions, is to be returned upon completion of the mission.
- If asked, the sergeant is willing to requisition horses for the characters.

When the characters have no further questions, Sergeant Ridout stands and the guards to his side come to attention. He hands the characters a map noting the location of the mansion where the auction is held.

“There’s not much time to waste. I wish that I had the manpower to spare for an escort, but between the arrests and the peacekeeping, we’ll be stretched thin and out of reach.

“Good luck to you all. Remember: these are dangerous, well-connected people you’ll be dealing with here. Be cautious where you can, and strike true when you must.”

With that, the sergeant leaves. Characters have, at maximum, two hours to rest or supply themselves for the adventure before departing.

PART 2. GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE

Estimated Duration: 90 minutes

1. THE INFILTRATION

Whether on foot or on horseback, it takes the characters the majority of the day to reach Yûlash. They encounter no issues along the journey, and the closer they get to the town, the fewer fellow travelers they encounter along the road.

As you approach Yûlash, you notice that the road is becoming steadily more overgrown. Grass and saplings sprout between broken cobblestones, and in the distance you can see that the buildings of this abandoned town are falling into a state of disrepair, with creeping vines and spreading bushes slowly taking over the once-bustling streets.

The map leads you to a stately residence just outside of the town limits, and you arrive just as night is beginning to fall. Here, the road has been cleared and maintained, and lights are burning in the two-story mansion up ahead. A high hedge surrounds the grounds, with an entryway already illuminated by flickering torches. Through this entryway, you can see a number of ornate coaches pulled up in front of the steps leading up to the mansion's front door, and a few finely dressed humans milling about.

As the characters approach the entryway, they are stopped by a huge, scarred man wearing a rapier at his side. This thug stands blocking the path and wordlessly holds out a hand. He's unresponsive to any questions the characters ask of him, and is waiting for their proof of referral. When characters offer him one of the tokens, read the following:

The guard closes his meaty fist around the offered token, and holds it up to his eye. He mutters something under his breath, and a symbol begins to glow on the token, casting a steady white light on the man's gnarled features. Satisfied, he grunts and hands back your token, then turns to the rest of the assembled party and holds out his hand again.

Each character must present their token to the guard. He determines that the tokens are genuine by speaking the word 'phylaxis'. Characters who succeed on a DC 15 Perception (Wisdom) check overhear this password.

Once all characters have presented their tokens, they are allowed entrance into the mansion grounds.

2. THE MANSION—GROUND FLOOR

Once through the hedges, you see an imposing façade ahead of you. The two-story building has clearly seen better days, but still gives an impression of faded grandeur. Elaborately carved columns are spaced along a short ledge that skirts the building itself. Windows are set into the walls at regular intervals, but they are dark—shuttered and barred from the inside. At the front of the mansion, a wide set of steps leads to the open front doors. Light spills out of them, illuminating a few finely dressed guests who are stepping out of carriages and making their way inside.

GENERAL FEATURES

A map of each of the mansion's floors can be found in the appendix. Be sure to reference these maps closely as the players move through the mansion. The mansion has the following general features.

Grounds. The mansion is surrounded by grass lawns bordered by a tall, dense hedge. Behind the mansion there is a small stone-flagged patio and an ornamental fountain.

Ceilings. The mansion's ceilings are 15 feet tall. The exceptions are the entrance hall (area 2A) and the ballroom (area 2D), which are 30 feet tall, and the basement rooms (area 4), which are 10 feet tall.

Light. The rooms are well-lit with lamps and torches unless otherwise indicated.

Doors. Doors are unlocked unless otherwise indicated.

Secret passages. The mansion is riddled with secret doors leading to hallways that were once used by servants to move around unobtrusively. Finding a secret door requires a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Guards. All guards at the mansion use the **thug** stat block.

Other guests have already begun to arrive for the auction, and are meandering about in the entrance hall (area 2A) and ballroom (area 2D). The auction itself has not yet begun, and additional guests filter in as the minutes pass.

Characters have a little time before the auction itself begins. If they choose to interact with the other attendees, they will find them to be polite, but disinclined to engage in prolonged conversation with potential rivals. They are mostly nobles from Hillsfar, and will react with disdain towards any non-human characters.

Characters may decide to influence the outcome of the auction through their interactions with other attendees—via Persuasion or Intimidation, for example. Reward creative roleplay with bonuses or advantage during the auction itself.

The guards working tonight's event are all thugs, dressed nicely to avoid offending the nobles' delicate sensibilities. They are all, to some degree, affected by the madness spreading from the portal

to the Underdark. Characters who are paying close attention may notice a guard's eye twitching, or their hand inching spasmodically towards a weapon, or even low, stream-of-consciousness muttering under their breath.

EXPLORING THE MANSION

Guests are permitted in the ground floor of the entrance hall (area 2A) and ballroom (area 2D) only. If characters attempt to enter any areas beyond these rooms, they must succeed at a Stealth check, against the passive Perception of any nearby guards. They are allowed three failed attempts:

The first time characters fail this check, they will be rebuked by the guard who noticed them, and told with barely-restrained hostility to stick to the permitted areas. From then on, this guard will be watching characters closely, and any Stealth check made to sneak into an off-limits area is made against his active Perception check.

The second time characters fail this check, this guard will alert the remaining guards in the mansion. All guards will be on high alert, and any Stealth check made to sneak into an off-limits area is made at disadvantage against the active Perception check of all guards within eyesight.

The third time characters fail this check, the guards will attack whichever character failed the attempt.

IF INFILTRATION FAILS

If fighting breaks out at any time in the mansion, the following changes take effect:

All guards on the ground (area 2) and first (area 3) floors will attack the characters. Guards in the wine cellar (area 4B) do not hear the commotion, and stay at their posts.

All guests—nobles and merchants—flee the mansion.

All servants hide in the kitchen (area 2H). They offer the same information under questioning, and Fillon reiterates that he's been saying that the guards have been itching for a fight.

Jaera Rathar locks herself in the master bedroom (area 3H). Any Charisma-based checks directed at her are made with disadvantage.

Allow the characters a short time to interact with guests and explore the mansion. The auction will begin after the characters have explored four rooms. At that point, a guard in the entrance hall (area 2A) rings a handheld bell to summon attendees to the ballroom (area 2D). Here, characters have the choice to either attend the auction, or continue exploring the mansion. If they choose to attend the auction, skip ahead to section 5, "The Auction."

2A. ENTRANCE HALL

A wide, spacious entrance hall greets you as you enter the mansion. The floor is paved with marble that has been well-polished for the visiting nobles; sideboards have been oiled, and the floral wallpaper appears fresh. Gas lamps are set into sconces on the walls, providing a steady warm light, and a torch-studded chandelier hangs from the ceiling.

To the north is a set of open doors that lead to the ballroom (area 2D). This door is flanked by two wide staircases with shining mahogany bannisters and steps covered in a threadbare red carpet. The stairs lead up to a balcony that runs around the east, south, and west sides of the room. Doors are set into the east and west walls (two on the ground floor and two on the upper level), and each side of the balcony ends in a door set into the north wall.

Two thugs are standing guard, one at the front door and one at the open entrance to the ballroom. As the characters enter, the guard at the front door hands them a flyer (**Player Handout 1**), which details the items up for auction this evening.

A small number of human nobles are standing around in small groups, talking quietly amongst themselves. As time passes, more guests arrive, and they begin to filter into the ballroom.

2B. DINING ROOM

From the general state of this room, it's clear that guests are not meant to be here.

In contrast to the opulent entrance hall, this room is in a state of disrepair. Dust covers the hardwood floor, and the wallpaper is cracked and peeling. Three windows set into the west wall have been boarded up, their drapes moth-eaten and heavy with dust.

The center of the room is taken up by a large, ornate table made of aged wood and ringed by chairs. They are all covered in dusty white canvas sheets.

There are no lanterns or lamps lit in this room. Light does spill from the space under the door to the entrance hall, providing dim light.

Secret door. A secret door—once a servant's entrance—is set into the north wall on the westernmost corner. To locate the secret door, a character must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check while examining the room. It leads to the west servants' passage (area 2F).

2C. DRAWING ROOM

This room was once an area for people to sit and converse. A stone fireplace with a dust-coated mantelpiece is set into the middle of the north wall.

This area has fallen into disrepair, with dusty floors and stained, peeling wallpaper. There are two couches and three plush armchairs covered in dusty white canvas sheets. The three windows set into the east wall have been boarded up.

There are no lanterns or lamps lit in this room. Light does spill from the space under the door to the entrance hall, providing dim light.

Secret door. A secret door—once a servant's entrance—is set into the north wall on the easternmost corner. To locate the secret door, a character must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check while examining the room. It leads to the east servants' passage (area 2G).

Treasure. Characters searching the fireplace find, amongst the dust and soot, an emerald pendant worth 20 gp.

2D. BALLROOM

This enormous, spacious room makes up the bulk of the mansion's volume.

This two-story ballroom still revels in the bygone splendor of the mansion. The oiled, hardwood floor is patterned in diamond chevron patterns made of light and dark wood which gleams in the light of several torches and lanterns that are set into the walls. Above, a wide metal-framed skylight is set into the ceiling, revealing a dark night sky.

To the north, three large windows reveal a sweeping expanse of darkened lawn behind the mansion. There are also doors at the northern ends of the east and west walls. A small 3-foot-tall stage has been set up at the eastern end of the room with a short flight of steps leading up to it.

A balcony runs around the east and west sides of the room. The balcony on the east side leads to two doors in the east wall. The balcony on the west side leads to a door at the north end of the west wall on this upper level.

Nobles mingle in small groups, while servants pass amongst them carrying refreshments. There appear to be a few guards observing the proceedings.

The two doors on the east balcony are locked, and require a DC 15 Dexterity check with thieves' tools to open.

One **thug** is stationed at the north end of each balcony (two in total), their attention on the ballroom floor below. On the ground floor, one thug stands at the door to the east. From time to time, uniformed servants come in and out of the door to the west, carrying trays of canapes.

Most of the nobles are human, but one group stands out due to its non-human members. Two men (one human named Ardent and one air genasi named Ariz) and one half-elf woman named Simue

are clustered together, dressed in stylish leather armor and carrying fine looking weapons. They are merchants (use **bandit** statistics) from the region surrounding Hillsfar who have come to participate in the auction. They are also not interested in prolonged conversation, but they act more warmly than the other nobles do towards non-human characters. They offer the following information if asked nicely:

- This is the second auction their group has attended, having only recently made the connections needed for an invitation. Depending on the makeup of the party, they may express a vague curiosity as to how the characters secured their invitation, but will take any explanation at face value.
- Guests are free to explore the entrance hall and the ballroom. Any other areas are off-limits.
- The auction is announced by a bell, and takes place in the ballroom.
- All three items are bid upon one after another, sight unseen. After all three bids have completed, the winners are taken into a side room to review their purchases, and to discuss payment and delivery with the organizer.
- The organizer's name is Jaera Rathar. The merchants don't know a lot about her, save that she's a native of Hillsfar.
- The merchants have no knowledge any other individuals affiliated with the auction.

2E. GALLERY

This room is larger than most of the areas of the mansion, and once showcased a number of paintings, sculptures, and other pieces of art.

Some rectangular patches on the stained, peeling wallpaper of this room are less faded, hinting where paintings once hung. A few modest plinths have been pushed into the corners of the room. The windows here have recently been boarded up with fresh wooden planks.

Towards the south end of the room, three guards stand in front of the three items that are up for auction tonight.

A strange odor, like natural gas, hangs in the air.

Given its history, it's fitting that this room has been repurposed into a place where the auction items are showcased to winning bidders.

- On a marble plinth sits a beautiful wooden box. It is carved from a strange, dark, purple-tinged wood from the Desert of Mulhorand, and is ornamented with golden inlay, hinges, and clasps. Inside, the box is lined with fine black velvet and contains an *immovable rod*.
- Beside this plinth is a life-size, and extremely life-like, statue of a human man. It has a curious

expression, a wide-eyed mixture of awe and horror.

- This is in fact Baern, the friend of Fillon the servant (see description in area 2H). Baern has been petrified by a medusa that has been captured by the smuggling organization for the purpose of creating exquisite statuary at the low cost of an expendable human life.
- Finally, there is a large, 10 ft. by 10 ft. iron cage. Inside the cage is Ph'theev, a **flumph** who has been kidnapped from near its cloister in the Underdark. A heavy, lead-lined sheet has been pulled over the cage and hides Ph'theev from view—this was done to block its telepathy. The odor is coming from Ph'theev.

Secret door. A secret door set in the south wall leads to the east servants' passage (area 2G) and may be found with a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check while examining the room.

Developments. Characters who attempt to enter this room without winning the auction, or without Jaera Rathar accompanying them, are immediately rebuked and turned away from the room. This counts as a failed Stealth attempt (see "Exploring the Mansion," above).

If characters are able—either because they have distracted the guards, or because they are accompanied by Jaera—they can pull the heavy lead-lined sheet off the cage and reveal Ph'theev. As soon as it is able, Ph'theev communicates telepathically with the characters.

"-on't understand why you're doing this, we are all in awful, awful danger—oh! Oh, you can hear me? You can hear me! Please, please, you have to tell them, have to warn them! They won't listen to me, and I fear it already may be too late!"

ROLEPLAYING PH'THEEV

Ph'theev is a fussy, earnest flumph. He is extremely distressed, in part because of his captivity, but mostly because of the impending danger from the psionic menace that has threatened his cloister and is already affecting members of the smuggling organization. He is frustrated that his pleas have gone ignored and wants desperately to find someone who can help put an end to this menace.

During combat, Ph'theev stays well back and out of danger, and does not get involved in the fight unless directly threatened. If that happens, he defends himself with his stench spray.

Ph'theev can explain the following to the characters.

- He comes from a cloister named Nyrsh'aff in the Underdark and is far away from home. The cloister has long lived in relative peace and enjoys friendly relations with a nearby settlement

of traders named Fool's March from the world above.

- Recently, however, a dark influence has made itself known. This psionic menace has driven several members of the cloister to insanity, due to their sensitivity to telepathic influences.
- The flumph cloister knows little about this menace and its motives, but believe it to be a force of great evil. As best they could tell, it was located somewhere in or around the nearby human settlement.
- Ph'theev was sent to the settlement to warn its occupants of the danger in their midst, but while travelling he was attacked and knocked unconscious. He awoke here, in this cage, with no knowledge of how he came to be here.
- He has been trying, unsuccessfully, to convince the auction organizers of the impending danger. Due to their conspicuous behavior, however, he believes that they have already been compromised and have come under the corrupting influence of the psionic menace.

Ph'theev begs the characters to release him and help him find his way home, so that he can help put a stop to this menace once and for all. If they are able to do so, Ph'theev will accompany the party throughout the rest of the adventure (although if he is spotted outside of his cage by any guards, they will immediately attack the characters who released him. See "If Infiltration Fails," above).

Treasure. If characters open the wooden box, they find a beautifully crafted *immovable rod*, made of obsidian with veins of bright purple crystal, and golden filigree. The box itself can be sold for 200 gp.

2F. WEST SERVANTS' PASSAGE

In contrast to the faded opulence of the rest of the mansion, this passageway is extremely utilitarian, with undecorated blank walls. The rough wooden floor is coated in a thick layer of dust, and it's clear that this passage has not been used in a very long time.

The entire passage is in pitch darkness. Characters who do not have darkvision will need to create their own source of light to see.

There is a doorway at the south end of the passage. The northern end has a flight of stairs leading upwards to the servants' wing (area 3C). Immediately before these stairs is another door set into the western wall.

2G. EAST SERVANTS' PASSAGE

In contrast to the faded opulence of the rest of the mansion, this passageway is extremely utilitarian, with undecorated blank walls.

Characters who make a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check will notice that the dust on

the floor here is disturbed, that a large amount of traffic has passed through this entire area. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check will reveal that the floorboards are scuffed and scratched, as though something heavy has been dragged this way. This is the route by which items and creatures sold at auction are taken from the basement level to the gallery (area 2E).

The entire passage is in pitch darkness. Characters who do not have darkvision will need to create their own source of light to see.

There is a doorway at the westernmost end of the passage. From there, the hall continues to the east and north. The east end of the passage ends in a flight of stairs leading to the private study (area 3G). Immediately before these stairs is another door set into the northern wall.

The north end of the passage ends in a flight of stairs leading downwards into the holding room (area 4).

Developments. If any characters are exploring this area during the auction, they have a 20% chance of encountering Jaera Rathar as she makes her way from the private study (area 3G) to the gallery (area 2e) to meet with the auction winners. Should this happen, proceed to section 6, “The Organizer.”

2H. KITCHEN

These kitchens were once the most bustling part of the mansion, and tonight they have been repurposed from their original task. The floors and walls are clean, and the entire room is warm from the heat of blazing ovens and cooking fires. The walls are lined with cupboards and countertops, and a large table dominates the middle of the room. Several of the surfaces are littered with food in various stages of preparation.

A door to the south leads to a kitchen storage room (area 2I). A secret door in the east wall leads to the western servants’ passage (area 2F).

Four servants are working in this room, preparing food for the assembled guests. Characters listening out of eyesight can overhear the servants talking amongst themselves—they are worried.

“All I’m saying,” starts a voice, low and urgent. “All I’m saying is, I’ve not seen Baern for almost a tenday, now. He was working here regular. And these guards . . . I don’t like the look in their eye. They’re itching for blood, I tell you. Something’s not right.”

“You’re paranoid, Fillon—” another servant cuts him off. “You know better than to mouth off. Keep your head down, keep your trap shut, and collect your pay with the rest of us.”

When the characters reveal themselves, the servants are shocked and beg to be spared. They

are all commoners and are easily persuaded or intimidated—despite their cautious words, they have no particular loyalty to the auction ring, and give up the following information if asked:

- There are three leaders of the organization—the auction organizer, Jaera Raethar, and two human men. One of them is named Threnn, but they have only heard the name mentioned and cannot describe him physically.
- They have no further knowledge of the organization, and cannot say how they procure the items that end up at auction.
- The doorway to the south leads to a storage room, and a stairway to the mansion’s basement. They’ve been forbidden from entering the basement, and have not tested their luck.
- They have worked preparing and serving food at these auctions for months now. In the past few tendays, though, something has changed—the rules are being enforced more strictly, sometimes brutally. Some of the guards working these events seem half-mad.
- Fillon’s friend, Baern, was working with him regularly, but has been missing for some time now. There’s usually some turnover amongst the servant staff, but Baern hasn’t shown up at his home either. Fillon suspects that the organization has something to do with it, but has no proof.

After being questioned, the servants promise not to tell anyone about the characters’ activities, and return to their duties.

2I. KITCHEN STORAGE ROOM

This small, windowless room contains numerous shelves stocked with food supplies.

A stone staircase in the southeast corner descends into the basement storage (area 4A).

Treasure. Characters searching the shelves find two small jars of saffron, worth 40 gp each.

3. THE MANSION—UPPER FLOOR

3A. GUEST ROOM

This large, open room once served as a guest bedroom. The only hint to this that remains is a large, heavy wooden bedframe that occupies much of the Southern half of the room.

Dust covers the wooden floorboards, and it is clear that this room has not been used in a long time. The windows set into the west and south walls have been long since boarded up.

There are no lanterns or lamps burning in this room. Light does spill from the space under the door to the entrance hall, providing dim light.

3B. LIBRARY

In the past, this was an exquisitely furnished and well-stocked library. Today, it has long since been stripped of any books and furnishings it once contained. Wooden bookshelves are built into the north, west and south walls of this room, providing the only clue to this room's former function.

Just like the other rooms deemed out of bounds, this room is clearly derelict and in disrepair. The windows in the south and east walls are boarded shut. There are no lanterns or lamps burning in this room. Light does spill from the space under the door to the entrance hall, providing dim light.

3C. SERVANTS' WING

This wing of the mansion is entirely abandoned—the smuggling operation has found no use for it. The long hallway is in dim light from the moonlight that spills in from between slats in boarded-up windows. Motes of dust float in the air, which is stifling and stale.

Secret door. At the east end of the hallway, next to the door to the ballroom balcony, stands a secret door which can be found with a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. The door opens into the staircase leading down to area 2F.

3D. SERVANT QUARTERS

This was once a bedroom for servants. The room is empty and contains nothing of interest.

3E. SERVANT QUARTERS

This was once a bedroom for servants. The room is empty save for a single simple wooden chair. There is nothing else of interest here.

3F. HEAD BUTLER'S QUARTERS

This room is a little larger than the other servants' rooms, and once belonged to the head butler of the mansion. It still contains a wooden bedframe and a desk covered in a dusty white cloth shroud.

Treasure. Characters searching the desk can attempt a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. If they succeed, they notice a secret compartment containing a ribbon made of rabbit's fur, worth 10 gp and a pouch with 34 gp and 16 sp.

3G. PRIVATE STUDY

Although not fully refurbished, this room has been restored to some semblance of its former glory. The floor is polished and clean, the walls are freshly painted, and the room is well lit. Jaera Rathar has claimed it as her personal study.

The door from the balcony of the ballroom is locked, and requires a DC 15 Dexterity check made by a character using thieves' tools to open. The door to the master bedroom (area 3H) is unlocked.

The room is lavishly furnished. Bookshelves laden with old titles line the north wall. Characters investigating these books see that they seem to be collected from around the civilized world, and some of them seem quite old and rare. Curiously, a stone statue of a human woman stands in the northwest corner of the room. It has been covered with a white shroud.

A polished mahogany writing desk and finely-crafted chair are set against the south wall of the room. Writing implements and reams of parchment are scattered on top of the desk, as is a logbook. The logbook is extremely incriminating—it records in detail the attendees and winners of previous auctions, their payment methods, the items won, and delivery details. The remaining documents give a sense of the structure of the smuggling organization, and name the organizers: Jaera Rathar, Threnn, and Nicodemus Finn. However, no indication is given of the organization's means of smuggling items from so far away.

Secret door. In the southeast corner of the room is a secret door, which can be found with a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check while searching the room. The staircase leads down to area 2G.

Developments. If characters explore this room before the auction begins and make no attempt to be quiet (and providing they have not already encountered her in area 2G), they will disturb Jaera Rathar, who is resting in the master bedroom. If this happens, proceed to section 6, "The Organizer."

3H. MASTER BEDROOM.

This room looks positively cozy. A lush, clean carpet takes up most of the floor, and a large four-post bed covered in silken sheets has been set up against the north wall. There is a bureau and a mirror set against the south wall.

The door from the balcony of the ballroom is locked, and requires a DC 15 Dexterity check made by a character using thieves' tools to open. The door to the private study (area 3G) is unlocked.

Developments. If characters enter this room before the auction begins and have not already encountered Jaera Rathar, she will be in here preparing for the auction. If this happens, proceed to section 6, "The Organizer."

If the room is uninhabited, characters will notice a silver token lying on top of the bureau. This is one of a set of tokens in Jaera's possession that will open the secret doorway in the wine cellar (area 4B), which leads to the smuggling operation's hideout.

Treasure. The bureau also holds a velvet coin pouch containing 77 gp, 28 sp, and 2 rubies (50 gp each).

4. THE MANSION—BASEMENT

4A. BASEMENT STORAGE

This stark, stone room contains a number of crates, shelves, and cleaning supplies such as brooms, mops, and buckets. The air is noticeably chillier down here, and smells faintly of dampness.

The staircase in the west wall leads up to area 2I. Light spills from the gap at the bottom of the door in the east wall, providing dim light.

Treasure. The crates and shelves are mostly filled with kitchenware. However, one particularly dusty wooden box tucked away behind a shelf contains seven silver candlesticks, worth 5 gp each.

4B. WINE CELLAR

The ceiling in this large, T-shaped cellar is low and arched, only 10 feet tall at its highest. The walls in the southern area are bare, and two long racks stretch from the west side of the room to the east. These once held an extensive collection of expensive wines and liquors, but they now stand empty and cobwebbed.

The area leading north is divided by three archways. Between the arches, barrels of wine are stacked three high. The majority are long since empty, but a few have been tapped and still hold a fine-tasting vintage.

There are 4 thugs in this cellar—two stationed at the north wall, and two patrolling around the wine racks in the southern area.

Secret door. Set into the north wall, the door is camouflaged extremely well and can only be spotted with a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check. However, characters examining the wall do notice a small slot-like indentation where the door is. This is where the silver tokens that act as keys are inserted.

Characters who make a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notice scratches and scores in the floor's flagstones, leading from the secret door to area 4C. These drag marks show the route by which the smugglers bring artifacts and creatures into the mansion proper.

Developments. When characters insert a silver token into the keyslot in the secret door, that portion of the wall slides upwards with a low rumble to reveal a torchlit passageway that descends into the earth. From there, proceed to part 3.

The basement level is secluded and soundproof. If fighting breaks out in this area, no guards in any of the aboveground levels of the mansion are alerted.

4C. HOLDING ROOM

This small stone-lined room is being used as a holding area for auction items. It is currently filled with a number of eerily lifelike statues of human men and women. These are all victims of the captured

medusa, as characters might be able to tell with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

Secret door. Characters who made a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notice drag marks along the floor leading from the entry door to the east wall. The secret door in the wall is easy to find if they are following the marks. The hallway behind leads to a staircase that connects to area 2G.

5. THE AUCTION

At the sound of the bell, the gathered nobles begin moving into the spacious ballroom. There is no seating, but most of the attendees seem to know from experience where to assemble—a small crowd begins to form in front of the raised platform at the east end of the room. As you watch, a beautiful human woman dressed in an elegant gown ascends the steps and takes center stage. She raises her hands, and the guests fall silent immediately.

“Welcome.” Her voice is clear and resonant, and carries easily in the large room. “Welcome, honored guests, old and new. We are delighted to have you with us, and we trust that the items available tonight will be to your great satisfaction. We have collected wondrous items of great power, exquisite craftsmanship, and a particularly exotic living specimen that will be sure to delight and astound. All fine additions to any collection of curiosities.

“We will begin the bidding momentarily. Please consult your pamphlets for the order of bids.”

AUCTION MECHANICS

The auction is conducted in rounds of bids, which go on until all parties have dropped out and one remains. The opening bid for each item is 300 gp.

Each item’s auction starts with 6 groups vying for the item, including the party. Each round, the entire party makes a contested group Charisma check—either Deception or Persuasion—against the other groups as they attempt to bluff or cajole their way to a win.

Reward creative roleplay with advantage where appropriate, if characters have previously made attempts to bully or win over other auction attendees.

Any NPC groups that fail the contested Charisma check will drop out of the bidding, convinced that the item is no longer worth the price. The auction then moves to the next round of bids, with the amount increasing by 20 gp each round. This continues until there is one winner.

The characters have been given a total of 350 gp to offer at the auction. Should they bid any amount above this, they must be willing to part with their own funds.

Jaera Rathar leads the auction from atop the podium. She carries herself with poise and speaks with a smooth, practiced patter that suggests a great deal of experience in this role.

Three items are being offered for auction, in the following order:

- Item 1: An *immovable rod*.
- Item 2: An exquisitely lifelike statue of a human man.
- Item 3: Ph’theev the flumph.

Characters are free to bid on any of these. Winning any one of the three items will earn the party a chance to review their prize in a private setting with Jaera herself.

DEVELOPMENTS

If characters win an item. Describe briefly the auctions for the remaining items (if any), then read the following:

As the final round of bidding concludes, a low murmur spreads throughout the room as attendees commiserate and gossip. Some nobles shoot dirty looks towards you, apparently annoyed that a group of first-timers have snatched a prize out from under them. After a few moments, the woman on the stage raises her hands once more for silence.

“This concludes tonight’s business. As always, you are all welcome to stay a while longer and enjoy yourselves with refreshments.” She looks towards you and smiles. “And congratulations to our winners. I believe that you are newcomers to our event—please, follow me. I am always eager to meet new faces.”

Jaera then leads characters to the gallery (area 2E). Once inside, she dismisses the three guards waiting in the room, who leave and wait outside in the ballroom.

If characters do not win an item.

As the final round of bidding concludes, a low murmur spreads throughout the room as attendees commiserate and gossip. Some nobles give you smug glances, apparently pleased to have bested the newcomers. After a few moments, the woman on the stage raises her hands once more for silence.

“This concludes tonight’s business. As always, you are all welcome to stay a while longer and enjoy yourselves with refreshments.”

Jaera then gestures towards a group of winners, who follow her into the gallery (area 2E). Shortly after they enter, two guards leave the room and close the door behind them. They then stand at the door, making sure nobody interrupts the proceedings within.

After some time, and another two groups being ushered into the study for a meeting, characters will see Jaera emerge from the gallery, and the two guards will go back inside. Jaera walks upstairs to the balcony via the staircase in the entrance hall, unlocks the door to the private study (area 3G), and remains there for the rest of the night.

6. THE ORGANIZER

There are several circumstances under which characters might encounter Jaera Rathar for the first time. Read whichever of the below most closely matches the situation, or extrapolate with your own description.

Wherever she is encountered, characters notice that, close-up, Jaera has a haggard, haunted look about her. She has not been sleeping well, and has been increasingly worried about the behavior of her co-conspirators Nicodemus Finn and Threnn. Characters making a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check will correctly surmise that she is anxious about something.

ENCOUNTERED IN THE EAST SERVANTS' PASSAGE (AREA 2G)

As you turn the corner, you hear the sound of footsteps coming down the wooden staircase ahead of you. Before you can react, a tall human woman in an elegant gown descends into view. She looks up, locks eyes with you, and freezes in place with one foot hovering above a stair.

"What on earth? Who are you? This area is completely off limits—you're not supposed to be here!"

ENCOUNTERED IN THE PRIVATE STUDY (AREA 3G)

As you search the room, the door in the north wall slowly swings open. A tall human woman in an elegant gown stands in the doorway, a grim and wary look in her eye.

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you that you're out of bounds. You have five seconds to explain yourselves before I call for the guards and have you killed."

ENCOUNTERED IN THE MASTER BEDROOM (AREA 3H):

As you open the door, the first thing you see is a tall, elegant human woman bent over a bureau and applying lipstick in the mirror. She notices you instantly, stepping away from the door with a gasp and backing up until her back hits a post of the canopied bed.

"There's money in the bureau." Her voice is calm, though her eyes are wide and dart about the room. "Not that it'll do you much good. I can have the guards here in seconds, and if you harm me, they'll kill you."

In all of the above scenarios, Jaera is immediately suspicious of the characters and concerned for her own safety. This imposes disadvantage on any Persuasion checks made towards Jaera.

ENCOUNTERED AFTER WINNING THE AUCTION

As guards depart the room and close the door behind them, the woman strides to the far end of the room. She walks up to an odd assortment of objects—tonight's auction prizes—and turns to face you all.

"Well, now. Congratulations are in order. I can assure you that you will not be disappointed in your purchase—I don't know how much you've heard about us, but we showcase the finest that the world has to offer." She extends a hand. "My name is Jaera Rathar. With whom do I have the pleasure of doing business?"

In this scenario, Jaera acts professional and accommodating towards the characters. She encourages them to take a close look at the item that they have won, and is only too happy to describe each of the items in detail, in the hopes of winning future business. See the description for the gallery (area 2E) for details.

Jaera has not personally encountered Ph'theev before. If the lead-lined sheet is removed from Ph'theev's cage, she is as shocked as the rest of the party to hear what he has to say.

ROLEPLAYING JAERA RATHAR

Jaera is a prominent member of Hillsfar society, and a proud woman with a long pedigree. She always tries to comport herself in a dignified and composed manner, as befits a person of her station. However, her veneer of professionalism masks a deep disdain for non-humans, which may bleed through in her interactions with non-human characters. She is similarly dismissive of her fellow Hillsfar nobility, and considers them indolent fools.

Jaera realizes that she has gotten in too deep with this criminal enterprise. She is also keenly aware that, unlike her colleagues who are proficient in martial and arcane arts, the only defenses she has are her title, wealth, and wits. She has a strong sense of self-preservation and is waiting for a better, safer opportunity to come her way.

DEVELOPMENTS

Given Jaera's increasing discomfort with the behavior of her colleagues, it does not take much to get her talking. If characters reveal that they have been sent to investigate and stop her organization, she is almost relieved at the opportunity to confess and wash her hands of this mess.

If Jaera is present when the party talks to Ph'theev, she has no trouble believing its story and is deeply shaken by the implications. This grants advantage to any Charisma checks that characters make towards her, and causes her to immediately open up to the party.

She reveals the following information when questioned:

- There are two other individuals running this smuggling operation—a brilliant young wizard and member of the Mages Guild named Nicodemus Finn, and a lowlife smuggler named Threnn.
- Jaera was approached by Nicodemus months ago at a function for the Mages Guild in Hillsfar. He had been working with Threnn to create a secret network of teleportation circles, and proposed to use them to procure rare, exotic goods from around the world and sell them at a high markup. With Jaera's contacts among the nobility, she would be a perfect liaison to develop a loyal customer base.
- It was Jaera's idea to start this 'farce of an auction' system. She knew that nothing would drive up prices faster than pitting the egotistical nobility against each other.
- She's heard that Nicodemus has a promising career in the Mages Guild. Threnn, however, is a mystery. She considers him a thuggish brute, but admits that he seems to have a good deal of acumen and reach in the criminal world.
- About a month ago, Nicodemus was able to open a link to the Underdark, thanks to Threnn's network. Ever since then, things have been going downhill. Threnn and his cutthroats are growing more savage in their behavior. Despite Jaera's urging, they almost exclusively bring over monstrosities from the Underdark.
- This is around the time when statues started appearing up for auction. Jaera dislikes them—their expressions unsettle her.
- Nicodemus also acts unhinged, like he's slowly losing his grip on reality.
- Fear of retribution from Threnn is the only thing keeping her from leaving the organization. She considers him more than capable of cold-blooded murder.
- The teleportation circle is located underneath the mansion, through a series of warrens and chambers that Threnn and Nicodemus have been using as a base of operations. The entrance is through a secret door in the north wall of the wine cellar, which will only open when unlocked by a silver token created by Nicodemus.

Jaera agrees to help the characters hasten the downfall of this organization, but will not endanger herself. She gives them a silver token that will unlock the secret door in the wine cellar (area 4B). She also directs the characters to the secret door that will lead to the east servants' passage (area 2G) and the staircase to the basement-level holding room (area 4A).

She can be persuaded to escort the characters downstairs and past the guards at the secret door. No amount of pressure will convince her to go deeper, though, especially if she hears what Ph'theev has to say about the psionic corruption.

If the players seem reluctant to press on to the smugglers' hideout, Ph'theev pleads with them to reconsider, and warns of dire consequences should this corruption be allowed to spread unchecked.

Emerald Enclave Faction Assignment. Faction agents can persuade Jaera to give herself up to the Enclave in exchange for sanctuary and asylum, fulfilling their assignment. She readily accepts this offer of a consequence-free escape.

Once the characters have unlocked and opened the secret door in the wine cellar, proceed to part 3. Note that if characters reach this point without encountering Ph'theev the flumph, they will have an opportunity to meet it in part 3.

PART 3. CONTAINMENT BREACH

Estimated Duration: 60 minutes

As players approach the smugglers' hideout, it quickly becomes apparent that something has gone horribly wrong. The psionic influence is still spreading through the teleportation circle deep within the hideout, and has driven most of its occupants beyond rationality.

Several dangerous creatures have gotten loose from their confinement and have begun slaughtering Threnn's operatives. Threnn himself has ordered a retreat, and the human occupants of the hideout have fled deeper into the caverns, barricading themselves in as they go.

If the party has not met Ph'theev yet, adjust the following text accordingly:

As you follow the rough-hewn stone passageway deeper underground, you feel the air get noticeably thicker and more oppressive. The tunnel twists and turns, and every so often you pass a blocked-off passage. These warrens are clearly part of an old complex that has been repurposed by this criminal enterprise.

Ph'theev bobs in the air behind you as you follow the tunnels downward, murmuring agitatedly. "Oh, oh it's awful, just awful . . . can't you feel it? Like a sour taste in your thoughts. It's growing stronger, I know it, I just know it. We must hurry!"

After ten minutes of walking, you come to a dead end. A wide metal sliding door has been set into the rock wall. The door itself is partially open, blocked from closing by some obstruction on the floor. As you approach closer, you notice a sharp smell in the air, a red smear on the doorframe, and the body of a human man lying over the threshold to this subterranean hideout.

GENERAL FEATURES

The smugglers' hideout has the following general features.

Architecture. The hideout is located in a refurbished cave system. The floors and walls are all made of rock. In larger caverns, the walls are irregular and rough-hewn. Smaller rooms have been created with care, and the walls are smooth. The floor in all areas is flat.

Ceilings. The ceilings in regularly-shaped small rooms are 10 ft. high. The ceilings in larger, more cavernous areas range from 15 to 20 ft. high.

Light. All rooms and passageways are lit by glowing green-white gems, affixed into the walls at regular intervals.

1. COMMON AREA A

Stepping over the corpse, you follow the narrow rock passage a little further before it opens up into a much larger chamber that looks almost like a natural cave. The air is warm, and thick with the stench of wood-smoke and blood. Tables and chairs litter the rough stone floor, scattered and splintered and broken.

Near the center of the room a cooking fire has been set up, and the corpse of a camel hangs from a spit over the dwindling flames.

To the northeast, another passageway leads deeper into the complex—however, a number of furnishings have been pushed into the passageway, creating a 10-foot-high barricade. There is also a metal doorway set into the east side of the cave, leading to the beast pens (area 2). The barricade takes 5 minutes to dismantle, which does not require any Strength check.

Death dogs are prowling around the fire, snarling and snapping at each other as they attempt to snatch bites at the camel's carcass while avoiding the flames. These creatures notice the players as soon as they enter the chamber, and attack immediately with the intent to kill.

ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTER

- Very Weak*
- **Death Dog:** AC 12, 33 hp, Init +2
- Weak*
- **Death Dog:** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2
- Average*
- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2
- Strong*
- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 44 hp, Init +2
- Very Strong*
- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 50 hp, Init +2

2. BEAST PENS

A short hallway leads to this spacious, rectangular room, which was used by the smuggling organization to store exotic creatures before they were sold at auction. A 15-foot-wide corridor runs down the center of the room, and is lined on both sides by four stark cells with metal bars.

The air in here is rank—it smells of blood, fur, and excrement. Half of the cells in this room are open wide, their original occupants appear to be recently deceased.

The four corpses belong to creatures from all corners of Faerûn—an owlbear, a harpy, a yeti and a lamia.

If characters have not already encountered Ph'theev the flumph in part 2, it is located in a

locked cell in this area. Refer to area 2E for details on its initial interaction with the characters.

Treasure. Characters searching the body of the lamia find a ruby-studded bangle on its arm, worth 80 gp.

3. COMMON AREA B

When characters break through the barricade, they're met with another scene of chaos and carnage. A jumble of crates and barrels occupies much of the north end of this cave. Most of them have been smashed, their contents—salted meats and other foodstuffs—scattered over the floor. Two **darkmantles** are hiding among this mess.

This chamber is a little smaller than the previous room, with two passageways leading off to the west. The lower passage ends in a metal doorway leading to the cell block (area 4). The upper passage leads to another hastily erected barricade.

Characters approaching the barricade hear muffled shouting and barked orders. It's obvious that a large number of people are on the other side. The barricade takes 5 minutes to dismantle, which does not require any Strength check.

One of the smugglers stands at the far end of the room with his back turned to the characters. Though it's not immediately obvious, this thug has been taken over by an **intellect devourer**. Read the following description if characters approach him.

As you approach the man, he gives no sign of being aware of your presence. His hand is dripping with something wet, which he is daubing on the wall to draw wild, jagged, frenetic designs and symbols that seem almost too disorganized and irregular to carry any meaning.

From this distance, you realize with a sickening sensation that the designs are drawn in blood—most of which seems to be coming from the man himself. As you watch, his hand jerks to his stomach, then comes away dripping red once more.

Characters who succeed at a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check can confirm that the designs and almost-symbols being scrawled on the wall are senseless and have no meaning behind them.

Characters who succeed at a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check still can't make sense of the writing, but they do recall a story or anecdote—they have heard of this particular kind of madness being exhibited by unfortunate souls who have been under the influence of a powerful illithid.

Developments. The devoured **thug** ignores all characters unless he is physically interrupted. As soon as this happens, he immediately attacks.

If the characters inspect the pile of ruined supplies, the darkmantles emerge and attack. They

also join in the battle if a fight breaks out with the devoured thug.

SETTING UP THE ENCOUNTER

Very Weak

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

Weak

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle:** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

Average

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle (2):** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

Strong

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle (3):** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

Very Strong

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle (2):** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Carrion Crawler:** AC 13, 51 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Surprise! If the thug is dropped to 0 hit points, the intellect devourer teleports out of the body and attempts to infest the nearest character.

4. CELL BLOCK

This area appears to be a smaller version of the beast pens. Three small, barred cells line each side of a narrow corridor. The cells are unlocked, and some of their doors are open.

Near the metal door at the west end of the room, a stone statue of a human man has fallen to the floor and smashed into several pieces. What's left of its face is contorted in an expression of horror.

The body of a human woman lies in the cell immediately to the left of the eastern entrance. This woman was a resident of Fool's March who was kidnapped by the smugglers.

Developments. Characters who search the body of the human woman find a scrap of paper tucked into her boot. The note is mostly illegible, but references a trading outpost in the Underdark called "Fool's March". If asked, Ph'theev confirms that this is where it was heading before it was kidnapped.

Near the fallen statue, characters also find a number of recently dropped vials. They have all been smashed open, and their contents are beginning to dry on the stone floor. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check confirms that this is a low-grade narcotic that imbues the user with a sense of ease and

contentment. This was used to calm the medusa's victims before they were petrified—otherwise their expressions as statues might give away their origin.

5. MIRROR CHAMBER

This tiny cube-shaped room houses a great danger. As a means of creating cheap and quick works of art, the smuggling organization has captured a medusa and are forcing it to use its petrifying gaze on kidnapped commoners.

The room itself is lined with mirrors on the north, south and west walls. In addition, a semicircle of freestanding mirrors has been set up at the far end of the room. These are all to discourage the medusa from using its gaze indiscriminately.

The medusa itself is tied with its arms spread wide between two iron posts that are set firmly and deep into the floor. It is blindfolded and emaciated, and slumps in its restraints as though deeply exhausted.

A cut in its neck oozes a thick black ichor that runs down its shoulder and over its breast. It has just survived an attempted culling by its captors. In their haste to kill it, they let its blindfold slip enough for it to see—though they were able to replace the blindfold, one of their number was petrified and now lies in pieces in the cell block.

As the characters enter the room, the medusa raises its head wearily and speaks in heavily accented Common:

“Come again, cowards? One did not satisfy? Do you thirst for death so?” The snake-headed woman chuckles a wet, gurgling sound. “You may use me, you may kill me, but . . .I’ll drag you . . .drag you all . . .to Baator with . . .me . . .”

After delivering these words, the medusa succumbs to its wounds and dies.

6. BARRACKS

Before reaching this area, characters must break through the barrier that has been erected by the surviving smugglers. As characters work at this, read the following:

From the other side of the barrier you can hear chaotic sounds of men running about, and several voices are raised in anger. As you listen, one man shouts above all the others, silencing them immediately:

“They’re coming through!! They’re coming for us all, they want our blood and our bodies and our minds! But we’re not gonna give ‘em up so easy, boys! They ain’t ours to give! All that belongs to a higher power, and he will not be denied!!”

There’s a roar of approval, and the voice rings out again. “You all, with me! We’ll find him out or die trying. And when we have received his blessing, we’ll return, and we’ll kill ‘em all! We’ll kill every last one of ‘em!”

If they are using non-magical methods, the characters are able to open a 5 foot space at the top of the barricade. This space counts as difficult terrain. Characters using magical methods may be able to break open a larger gap more quickly.

The cavern beyond is roughly circular in shape, and contains around 20 lightweight bunks. The smuggling organization has been using this space as a barracks. A large metal sliding door is set into the east wall, leading to the teleportation chamber. Threnn and his thugs have just left via this door and have shut it behind them.

The door is not locked and can easily be slid open by two characters working together. If one character attempts to open it on their own, they must succeed at a DC 10 Athletics (Strength) check to do so.

Treasure. Hidden under one bunk is a small, unlocked chest containing a stash of loot belonging to Threnn. Inside the chest is 70 gp, 86 sp, and three emeralds worth 15 gp each.

PART 4. THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

Estimated Duration: 45 minutes

Immediately beyond the doorway in the barracks lies the teleportation chamber. This open, rectangular room has been excavated and outfitted to serve as the hub of Nicodemus Finn's homemade network of teleportation circles.

GENERAL FEATURES

The teleportation chamber has the following general features.

Walls. The walls of this room are smooth and flat, having been carefully excavated and shaped from the rock.

Ceiling. The ceiling in this chamber is 30ft high.

Scaffolding. The walkway running along the north, west and south walls is 10 feet tall and constructed of sturdy metal, with metal-plate floors.

Cages. Four cages along the north wall are operated by a system of levers on the gantry directly above them. Moving the lever takes 1 action. When closed, the doors are mechanically locked and cannot be opened without a DC 20 Strength check.

Light. The room is lit by glowing green-white gems, fixed into the walls at regular intervals.

Teleportation Circle. A 15 ft. diameter teleportation circle has been inscribed in the east end of the room. It glows faintly at all times, even when not in use. Characters moving within 5 feet of the circle's perimeter must roll a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the character rolls a d100 and is subject to the appropriate effect on the Long-Term Madness table (see *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 260).

The circle has been carved into the rock itself, and any attempts to disrupt it must be powerful enough to fracture the rock itself.

A metal balcony hangs over the entrance to this room, supported by struts sunk into the rock floor. This scaffolding is accessed by staircases set against the north and south walls.

A series of four cages is also set into the north wall underneath the scaffold. Each cage contains one of the following creatures:

- **Yuan-ti broodguard**
- **Intellect devourer**
- **Cockatrice**
- **Dryad**

These creatures are all clearly mad—they snarl and hiss at the characters when they enter, a deranged gleam in the eyes of even the sentient creatures.

At the far end of the room is the teleportation circle—the portal through which this corruption has spread. The lines and symbols are carved directly into the rock, and they glow with an eerie blue-tinged light

When characters open the door, read the following:

Ahead of you lies a spacious, open room that almost resembles a warehouse. A bright blue light is shining at the far end of the room, emanating from the symbols of a teleportation circle that's been carved into the floor. It's brilliant in its intensity, almost too bright to look at directly.

Squinting into the light, you can just make out a tall, bald man with a long beard, flanked by six other men. As the glow from the circle glows brighter, the tall man whips around and stares at you with wide, mad eyes, and his lips split in a wide grin. He raises a hand into the air and gives a mocking little wave just as the circle flashes, momentarily blinding you. When the light fades to a low glow a few seconds later, he and his associates have vanished.

As Threnn and his henchmen vanish through the teleportation circle, characters hear giggling from the section of scaffolding against the north wall, above them. Nicodemus Finn (use **illusionist** statistics from *Volo's Guide to Monsters*) leans against the railing and looks down at the characters, speaking in a singsong voice.

"He doesn't know! He has no idea. And you know the funniest part? Neither do I!" The man talking looks extremely young—barely past his mid-twenties—but there's a haggard look to his face. His robes are filthy, stained and caked with unnamable grime. He gestures wildly at the teleportation circle, which still glows faintly. "I can't even guess! Look, it's still open, it won't close! How does it do that? Why does it do that? Is it because it wants to?"

The young wizard giggles again, teetering over towards the north wall and out of sight. "I did it wrong." His voice hums from above. "Some misplaced sigil, maybe...I see it now, I can't deny it. Not after all this...all this..." He laughs again, a desperate high-pitched cackle. You hear him tugging at something, and there's a mechanical grinding sound. Below him, the creatures in the cages begin to howl and throw themselves against the barred doors.

"But it's all right! I can make it stop! All I have to do is kill you, and the voices will be silent again!!"

ROLEPLAYING NICODEMUS FINN

Nicodemus is a brilliant young illusionist who has been using magic well past his abilities in creating the network of teleportation circles. He believes that he is to blame for the escalation of events due to some error in his creation of the network, rather than the external threat in the Underdark. He is under the delusion that killing the characters will somehow set things right.

SETTING UP THE ENCOUNTER

Very Weak

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
has no 4th level spell slots

Weak

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2

Average

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
releases either intellect devourer OR yuan-ti broodguard
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2
- **Yuan-ti Broodguard:** AC 14, 45 hp, Init +2

Strong

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
releases cockatrice
releases either intellect devourer OR yuan-ti broodguard
- **Cockatrice:** AC 11, 27 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2
- **Yuan-ti Broodguard:** AC 14, 45 hp, Init +2

Very Strong

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
releases cockatrice and dryad
releases either intellect devourer OR yuan-ti broodguard
- **Cockatrice:** AC 11, 27 hp, Init +1
- **Dryad:** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2
- **Yuan-ti Broodguard:** AC 14, 45 hp, Init +2

As soon as that happens, characters feel a mental weight that they hadn't been fully conscious of disappear.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Tactics. As combat begins, Nicodemus pulls a lever to release as many creatures from their cages as is appropriate for the party's level (see "Setting up the Encounter", above). After doing so, Nicodemus stays on the scaffolding for as long as possible. He attempts to use his elevation to his advantage as he casts spells down at the characters.

Helpful Advice. If Ph'theev is present, it telepathically warns the characters to be careful around the teleportation circle, but does not willingly enter combat.

DEVELOPMENTS

If any characters pass within 5 feet of the perimeter of the teleportation circle, they must succeed at a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the character rolls a d100 and suffers from a long-term madness effect (see *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 260).

Once Nicodemus and any released creatures are killed, Ph'theev floats into the room and hovers near the faintly glowing teleportation circle, an aura of worry radiating from it. With some effort, it corrodes a line in the rock with an acidic tentacle, breaking the circle and causing the glow to fade.

CONCLUSION

With the smuggling organization's base of operations near Hillsfar and the auction ring dealt with, characters are able to send word back to Sergeant Ridout that their mission is complete. The sergeant arrives in a matter of hours, accompanied by a number of Red Plume guards. He confirms that they have secured the mansion above and are going through it with a fine-toothed comb.

If characters have pocketed the logbook from the mansion's private study (area 3G), Sergeant Ridout is extremely grateful for the list of auction attendees and detailed evidence against them. Otherwise, he informs the characters that the Red Plumes have located the logbook upstairs and have more than enough evidence to make some key arrests, no matter how much fuss the city's elite kick up.

If any characters point out that they never had to spend the 350 gp loaned by the Red Plumes for the auction, Sergeant Ridout magnanimously decides to let them keep the money in light of their excellent work.

Meanwhile, Ph'theev insists that the danger is not yet settled. It begs the players to accompany it back to the Underdark and help deal with the psionic menace that still threatens its cloister and the human settlement of Fool's March. Sergeant Ridout agrees that it would be beneficial to explore this, especially given that Threnn is still at large and presumably in the Underdark.

The Sergeant confirms that he will have a member of the Mages Guild here as soon as possible to examine the teleportation circle and make it safely operational again. In the meantime, he requests that the characters stay in the area, as their services may be needed again soon.

REWARDS

Make sure players note their rewards on their adventure log sheets. Give your name and DCI number (if applicable) so players can record who ran the session.

EXPERIENCE

Total up all combat experience earned for defeated foes, and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. For non-combat experience, the rewards are listed per character.

COMBAT AWARDS

Name of Foe	XP Per Foe
Death Dog	200
Hell Hound	700
Thug	100
Bandit	25
Darkmantle	100
Carrion Crawler	450
Illusionist	700
Intellect Devourer	450
Yuan-Ti Broodguard	450
Cockatrice	100
Dryad	200

The **minimum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is **900 experience points**.

The **maximum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is **1,200 experience points**.

TREASURE

The characters receive the following treasure, divided up amongst the party. Treasure is divided as evenly as possible. Gold piece values listed for sellable gear are calculated at their selling price, not their purchase price.

TREASURE AWARDS

Item Name	GP Value
Sergeant's Offer for Infiltration	200
Emerald Pendant	20
Wooden Box	200
Jar of Saffron (2)	40 each
Ribbon of Rabbit Fur	10
Pouch	35
Velvet Coin Pouch	79
Rubies (2)	50 each
Silver Candlestick (7)	5 each
Ruby-studded bangle	80
Chest	78
Emerald (3)	15 each

Consumable magic items should be divided up however the group sees fit. If more than one character is interested in a specific consumable magic item, the DM can determine who gets it randomly should the group be unable to decide.

Permanent magic items are divided according to a system detailed in the D&D Adventurers League Dungeon Master's Guide.

IMMOVABLE ROD

Rod, uncommon

This rod is a beautifully crafted collector's item made of jet-black obsidian, with veins of bright purple crystal and golden filigree. This item can be found in **Player Handout 2**.

RENOWN

Each character receives **one renown** at the conclusion of this adventure.

Members of the Harpers who have successfully brought Ph'theev to the teleportation circle and have given him a chance to return home are considered to have fulfilled their assignment and earn **one additional renown point**.

Members of Emerald Enclave that can persuade Jaera to give herself up to the Enclave in exchange for sanctuary and asylum, fulfill their assignment and earn **one additional renown point**.

DM REWARD

In exchange for running this adventure, you earn DM Rewards as described in the *D&D Adventurers League Dungeon Master's Guide* (ALDMG).

APPENDIX. DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following NPCs are featured prominently in this adventure:

Jaera Rathar (JAY-ruh ra-THAR). A noblewoman from Hillsfar, and the organizer of the black-market auctions.

Nicodemus Finn (nick-oh-DEE-mus Finn). A member of the Mages Guild of Hillsfar, and the architect of the smuggling operation.

Threnn (THREN). A mysterious and well connected smuggler with ties to the criminal underworld worldwide, and the organizer of the smuggling operation.

Sergeant Alder Ridout (ALL-der RIDE-out). Sergeant of the Red Plumes, and head of the investigation into the smuggling operation.

Ph'theev (FUH-theev). A flumph, kidnapped from its cloister while on a mission of great importance.

Fillon Thatcher (FILL-on THA-cher). A commoner working as a servant at the auctions, who has his suspicions about the operation.

APPENDIX. MONSTER/NPC STATISTICS

DEATH DOG

Medium monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Two-Headed. The dog has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, or knocked unconscious.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dog makes two bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw against disease or become poisoned until the disease is cured. Every 24 hours that elapse, the creature must repeat the saving throw, reducing its hit point maximum by 5 (1d10) on a failure. This reduction lasts until the disease is cured. The creature dies if the disease reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

HELL HOUND

Medium fiend, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +5

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages understands Infernal but can't speak it

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The hound has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. The hound has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the hound's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The hound exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

THUG

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Pack Tactics. The thug has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The thug makes two melee attacks.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

BANDIT

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

DARKMANTLE

Small monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 22 (5d6 + 5)

Speed 10 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +3

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Echolocation. The darkmantle can't use its blindsight while deafened.

False Appearance. While the darkmantle remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a cave formation such as a stalactite or stalagmite.

ACTIONS

Crush. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the darkmantle attaches to the target. If the target is Medium or smaller and the darkmantle has advantage on the attack roll, it attaches by engulfing the target's head, and the target is also blinded and unable to breathe while the darkmantle is attached in this way.

While attached to the target, the darkmantle can attack no other creature except the target but has advantage on its attack rolls. The darkmantle's speed also becomes 0, it can't benefit from any bonus to its speed, and it moves with the target.

A creature can detach the darkmantle by making a successful DC 13 Strength check as an action. On its turn, the darkmantle can detach itself from the target by using 5 feet of movement.

Darkness Aura (1/Day). A 15-foot radius of magical darkness extends out from the darkmantle, moves with it, and spreads around corners. The darkness lasts as long as the darkmantle maintains concentration, up to 10 minutes (as if concentrating on a spell). Darkvision can't penetrate this darkness, and no natural light can illuminate it. If any of the darkness overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 2nd level or lower, the spell creating the light is dispelled.

CARRION CRAWLER

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 51 (6d10 + 18)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

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

Spider Climb. The carrion crawler can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The carrion crawler makes two attacks: one with its tentacles and one with its bite.

Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. Until this poison ends, the target is paralyzed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the poison on itself on a success.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

INTELLECT DEVOURER

Tiny aberration, lawful evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 21 (6d4 + 6)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities blinded

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 12

Languages understands Deep Speech but can't speak, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Detect Sentience. The intellect devourer can sense the presence and location of any creature within 300 feet of it that has an Intelligence of 3 or higher, regardless of interposing barriers, unless the creature is protected by a *mind blank* spell.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The intellect devourer makes one attack with its claws and uses Devour Intellect.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Devour Intellect. The intellect devourer targets one creature it can see within 10 feet of it that has a brain. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence saving throw against this magic, or take 11 (2d10) psychic damage. Also on a failure, roll 3d6. If the total equals or exceeds the target's Intelligence score, that score is reduced to 0. The target is stunned until it regains at least one point of Intelligence.

Body Thief. The intellect devourer initiates an Intelligence contest with an incapacitated humanoid within 5 feet of it. If it wins the contest, the intellect devourer magically consumes the target's brain, teleports into the target's skull, and takes control of the target's body. While inside a creature, the intellect devourer has total cover against attacks and other effects originating outside its host. The intellect devourer retains its Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, as well as its understanding of Deep Speech, its telepathy, and its traits. It otherwise adopts the target's statistics. It knows everything the creature knew, including spells and languages.

If the host body drops to 0 hit points, the intellect devourer must leave it. A *protection from evil and good* spell cast on the body drives the intellect devourer out. The intellect devourer is also forced out if the target regains its devoured brain by means of a *wish*. By

spending 5 feet of its movement, the intellect devourer can voluntarily leave the body, teleporting to the nearest unoccupied space within 5 feet of it. The body then dies, unless its brain is restored within 1 round.

NICODEMUS FINN (ILLUSIONIST)

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +2

Skills Arcana +5, History +5

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any four languages

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Spellcasting. The illusionist is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The illusionist has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *poison spray*

1st level (4 slots): *color spray*,* *disguise self*,* *mage armor*, *magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility*,* *mirror image*,* *phantasmal force**

3rd level (3 slots): *major image*,* *phantom steed**

4th level (1 slot): *phantasmal killer**

*Illusion spell of 1st level or higher

Displacement (Recharges after the Illusionist Casts an Illusion Spell of 1st Level or Higher). As a bonus action, the illusionist projects an illusion that makes the illusionist appear to be standing in a place a few inches from its actual location, causing any creature to have disadvantage on attack rolls against the illusionist. The effect ends if the illusionist takes damage, it is incapacitated, or its speed becomes 0.

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 – 1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8 – 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

Source: *Volo's Guide to Monsters*

YUAN-TI BROODGUARD

Medium humanoid (yuan-ti), neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	4 (-3)

Saving Throws Str +4, Dex +4, Wis +2

Skills Perception +2

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Mental Resistance. The broodguard has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't paralyze it.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the broodguard can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

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

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

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

Source: *Volo's Guide to Monsters*

COCKATRICE

Small monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 27 (6d6 + 6)

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw against being magically petrified. On a failed save, the creature begins to turn to stone and is restrained. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends. On a failure, the creature is petrified for 24 hours.

DRYAD

Medium fey, neutral

Armor Class 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The dryad's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). The dryad can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *druidcraft*

3/day each: *entangle*, *goodberry*

1/day each: *barkskin*, *pass without trace*, *shillelagh*

Magic Resistance. The dryad has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. The dryad can communicate with beasts and plants as if they shared a language.

Tree Stride. Once on her turn, the dryad can use 10 feet of her movement to step magically into one living tree within her reach and emerge from a second living tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be Large or bigger.

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit (+6 to hit with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage, or 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

Fey Charm. The dryad targets one humanoid or beast that she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see the dryad, it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed. The charmed creature regards the dryad as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under the dryad's control, it takes the dryad's requests or actions in the most favorable way it can.

Each time the dryad or its allies do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until the dryad dies, is on a different plane of existence from the target, or ends the effect as a bonus action. If a target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to the dryad's Fey Charm for the next 24 hours.

The dryad can have no more than one humanoid and up to three beasts charmed at a time.

APPENDIX. ENCOUNTER SETUP

THE HILLSFAR GATE

VERY WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (200 XP)

- **Death Dog:** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (400 XP)

- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

AVERAGE PARTY STRENGTH (600 XP)

- **Death Dog (3):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (800 XP)

- **Death Dog (4):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

VERY STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (1,300 XP)

- **Death Dog (3):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2
- **Hell Hound:** AC 15, 45 hp, Init +1

COMMON AREA A

VERY WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (200 XP)

- **Death Dog:** AC 12, 33 hp, Init +2

WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (200 XP)

- **Death Dog:** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

AVERAGE PARTY STRENGTH (400 XP)

- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 39 hp, Init +2

STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (400 XP)

- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 44 hp, Init +2

VERY STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (400 XP)

- **Death Dog (2):** AC 12, 50 hp, Init +2

COMMON AREA B

VERY WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (550 XP)

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (650 XP)

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle:** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

AVERAGE PARTY STRENGTH (750 XP)

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle (2):** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (850 XP)

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle (3):** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

VERY STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (1,200 XP)

- **Thug:** AC 11, 32 hp, Init +0
- **Darkmantle (2):** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Carrion Crawler:** AC 13, 51 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2

THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

VERY WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (700 XP)

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
has no 4th level spell slots

WEAK PARTY STRENGTH (700 XP)

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2

AVERAGE PARTY STRENGTH (1,150 XP)

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
releases either intellect devourer OR yuan-ti broodguard
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2
- **Yuan-ti Broodguard:** AC 14, 45 hp, Init +2

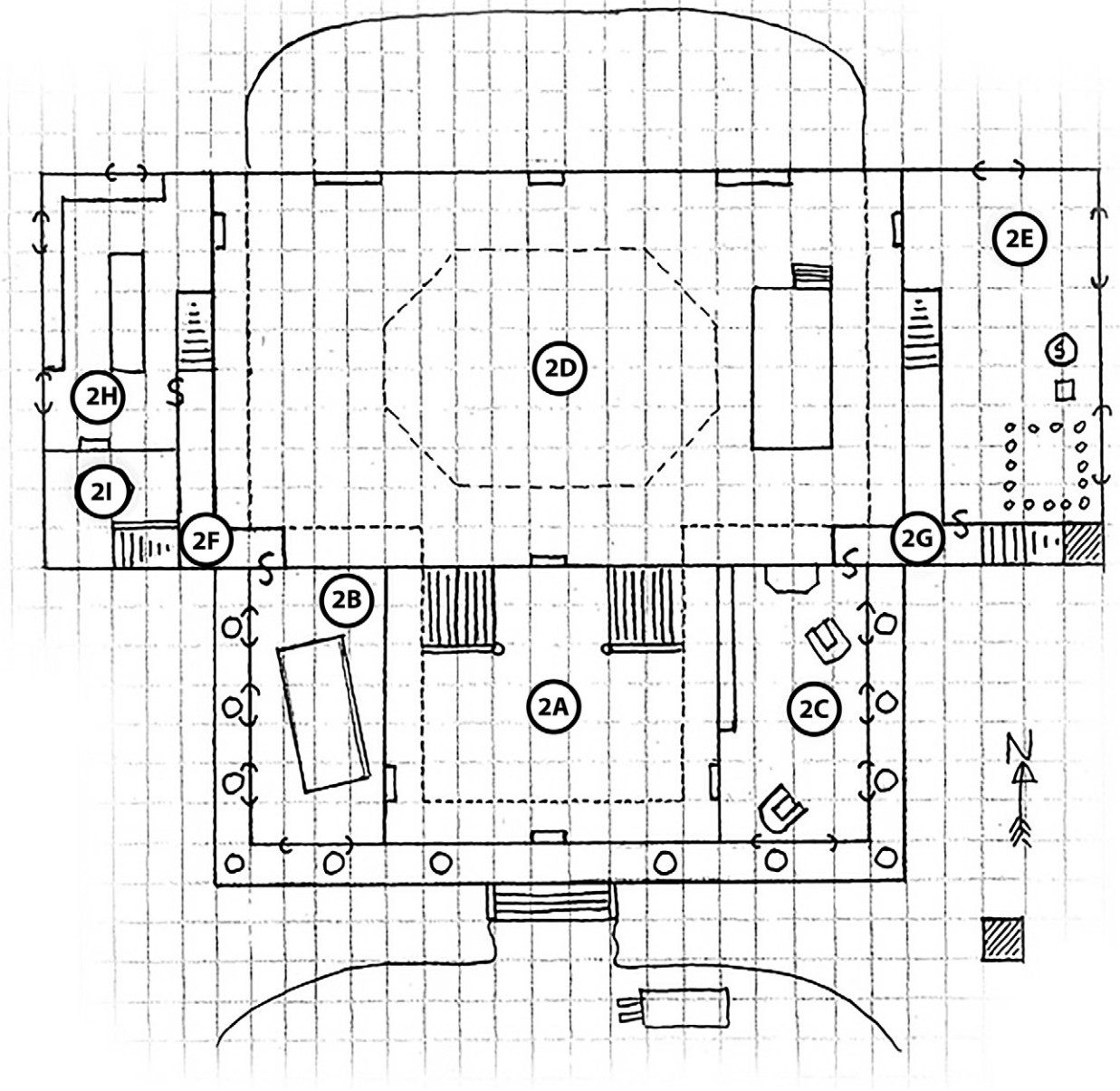
STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (1,250 XP)

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
releases cockatrice
releases either intellect devourer OR yuan-ti broodguard
- **Cockatrice:** AC 11, 27 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2
- **Yuan-ti Broodguard:** AC 14, 45 hp, Init +2

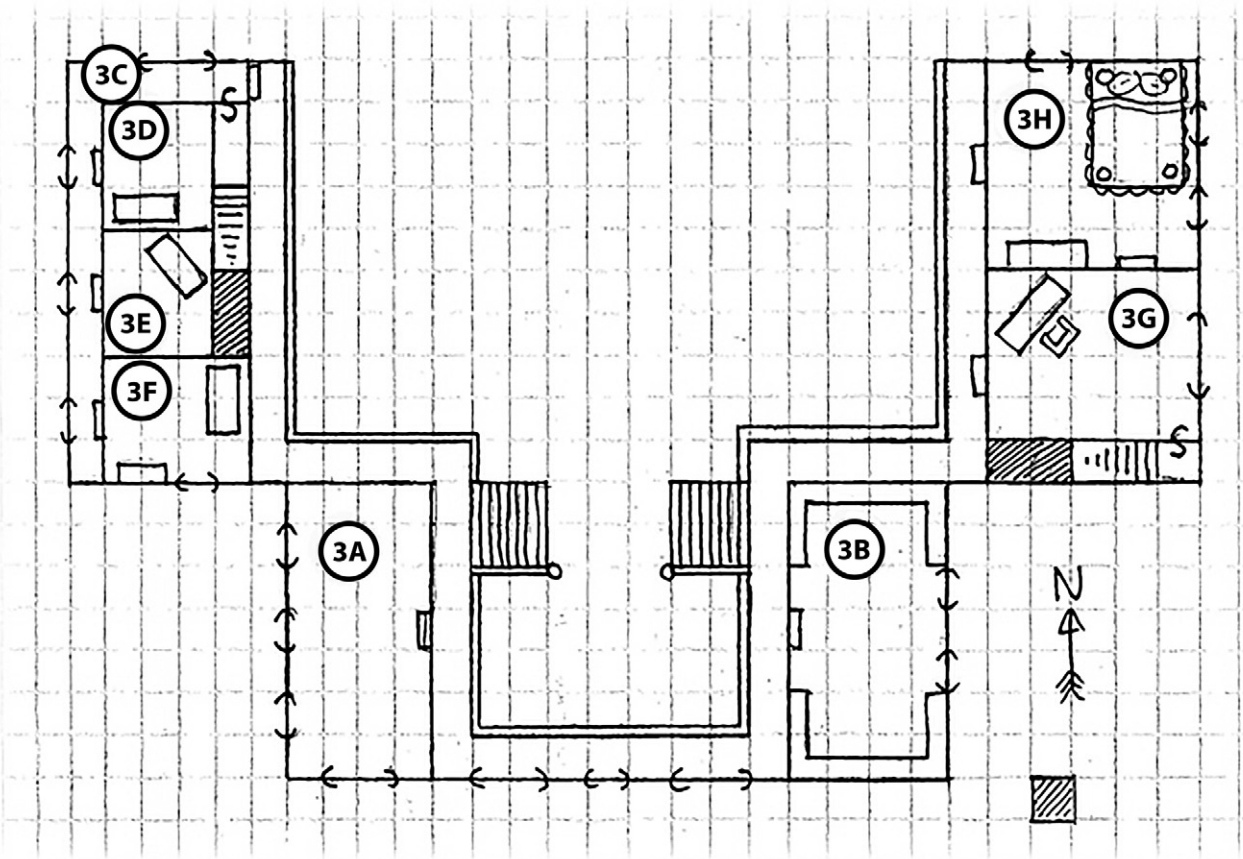
VERY STRONG PARTY STRENGTH (1,450 XP)

- **Nicodemus Finn:** AC 12 (15 with *mage armor*), 38 hp, Init +2
releases cockatrice and dryad
releases either intellect devourer OR yuan-ti broodguard
- **Cockatrice:** AC 11, 27 hp, Init +1
- **Dryad:** AC 11, 22 hp, Init +1
- **Intellect Devourer:** AC 12, 21 hp, Init +2
- **Yuan-ti Broodguard:** AC 14, 45 hp, Init +2

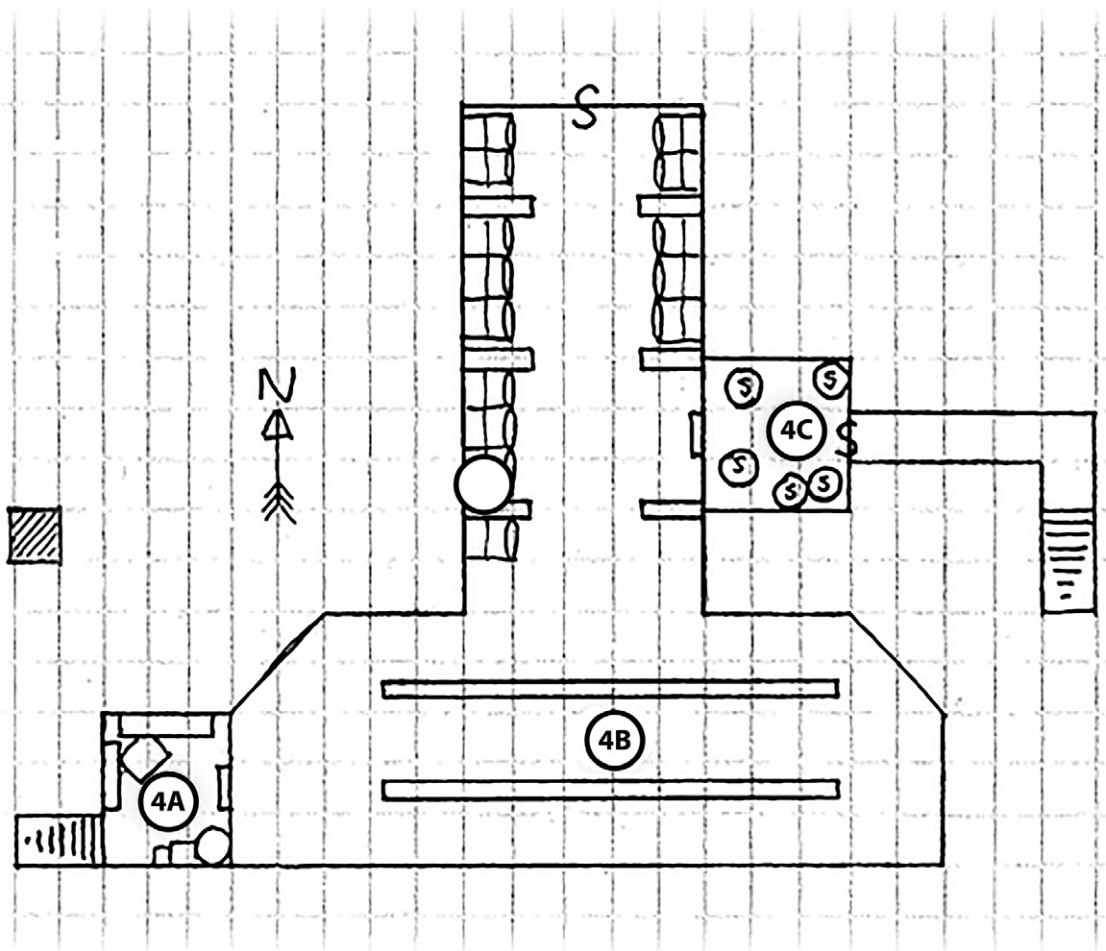
APPENDIX. THE MANSION—GROUND FLOOR MAP



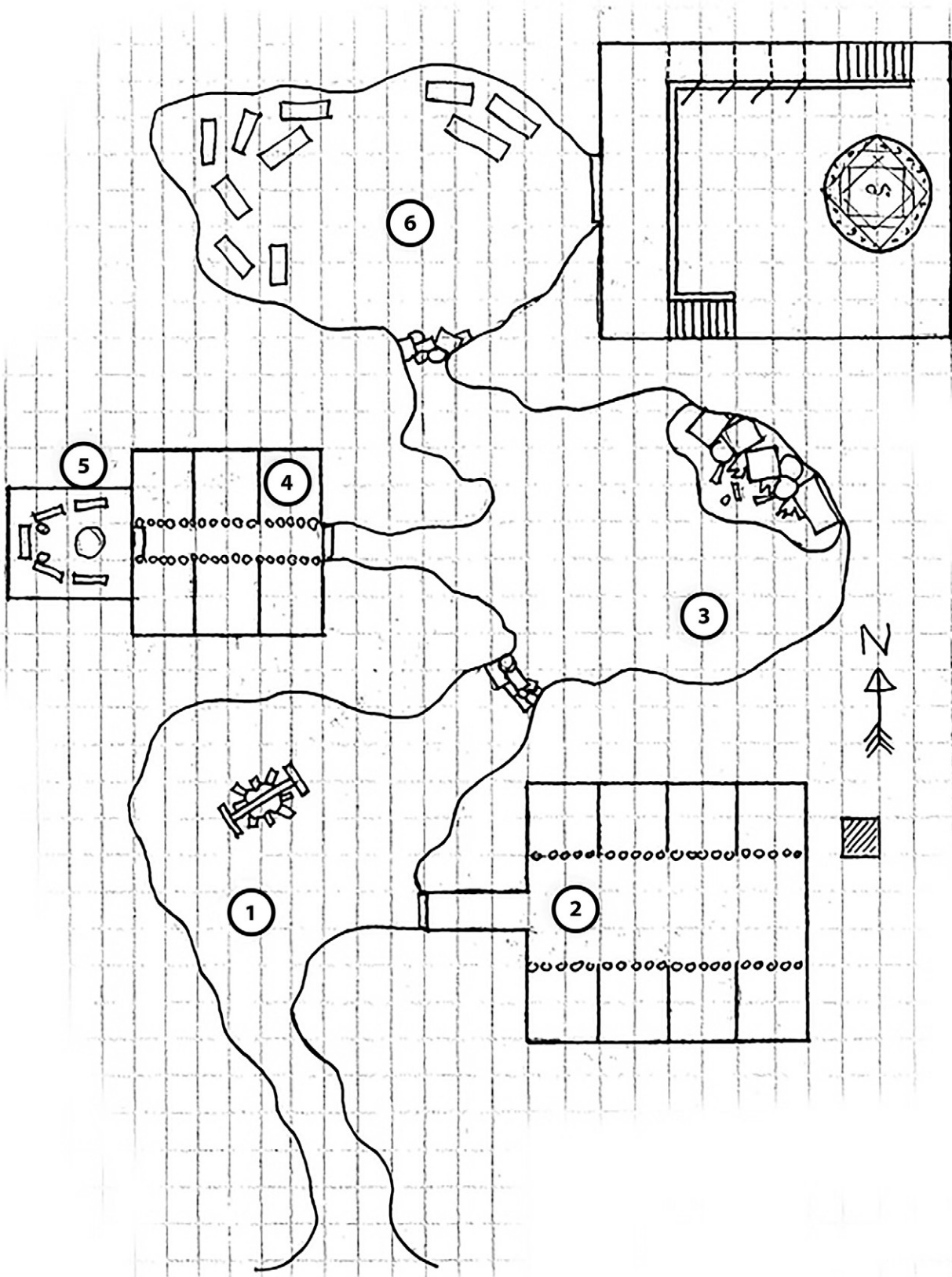
APPENDIX. THE MANSION—UPPER FLOOR MAP



APPENDIX. THE MANSION—BASEMENT MAP



APPENDIX 5. MAP OF THE SMUGGLERS' HIDEOUT



PLAYER HANDOUT 1. AUCTION ITEMS

Order of Events

Item the First

A fantastical and mysterious magical rod of great power crafted by the desert mages of Mulhorand. Its artful design belies its strength; once affixed, a team of oxen cannot shift it from its place.

Item the Second

A statue of rare and exquisite craftsmanship, hewn from humble rock to perfectly portray the human form. No collection of art is complete without such a piece – it captures the very soul of humanity in stone.

Item the Third

An exotic and wondrous creature fetched from deep beneath the earth, the likes of which is only rarely seen above ground. Shocking in appearance and gentle in nature, this beast will make a fine addition to any menagerie.

PLAYER HANDOUT 2. MAGIC ITEM

During the course of this adventure, the characters may find the following permanent magic item:

IMMOVABLE ROD

Rod, uncommon

This flat rod has a button on one end. You can use an action to press the button, which causes the rod to become magically fixed in place. Until you or another creature uses an action to push the button again, the rod doesn't move, even if it is defying gravity. The rod can hold up to 8,000 pounds of weight. More weight causes the rod to deactivate and fall. A creature can use an action to make a DC 30 Strength check, moving the fixed rod up to 10 feet on a success.

This rod is a beautifully crafted collector's item made of jet-black obsidian, with veins of bright purple crystal and golden filigree.

This item can be found in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*.