

If the characters do nothing to oppose the Zhent mercenaries, Xolkin orders his men to raise the drawbridge while he uses his flying snake to send a message to the Snail, letting him know that the village is under the Black Network's control. If the characters killed Xolkin's flying snake, Xolkin orders one of his mercs to ride to Daggerford and report the news while the others "hold down the fort." If combat erupts, Xolkin drinks his *potion of invulnerability* before leaping into the fray.

The Zhents have no easy way to reach the keep and ignore it for the time being. That said, if the Zhents learn that some of Lady Nandar's guards are holed up in the keep, they urge friendly characters to dispose of the guards. Similarly, if the characters are on friendly terms with the guards in the keep, the guards ask the characters to save the village from Zhentarim occupation.

The characters are under no obligation to rid Nightstone of Kella Darkhope and the Seven Snakes. If they defeat the Zhents or come to terms with them, allow the characters to take a long rest, if they wish, before continuing with the "Ear Seekers" event.

Treasure. Xolkin wears a gold ring (worth 25 gp) emblazoned with the symbol of the Zhentarim: a black winged serpent. He also carries a pouch that holds 4 pp, 13 gp, five 100 gp gemstones that he willingly trades for Kella's life, and a *potion of invulnerability*.

Each of the other mercenaries carries a pouch that holds 2d10 gp.

EAR SEEKERS

The wood elves of the Ardeep Forest are at war with a neighboring tribe of orcs called the Ear Seekers (so named because they wear necklaces made of elf ears). Gurrash, the orc war chief, recently led an attack on the forest. Unfortunately for the orcs, the elves were ready for them. More than half of the orc horde perished, and the surviving orcs were forced to flee. Gurrash and several orcs escape out of the forest, make their way south, and stumble upon Nightstone. Knowing that the elves aren't far behind, Gurrash and his orcs try to fight their way into the village and make a stand there.

Gurrash, the **orc war chief**, is bleeding from wounds inflicted by elven arrows and has 60 hit points remaining. He leads a force consisting of twenty uninjured **orcs** and an uninjured **orc Eye of Gruumsh** named Norgra One-Eye. Norgra is Gurrash's lieutenant and assumes command if the war chief dies.

The orcs have no gear other than their weapons and armor. If the drawbridge is lowered, they rush toward it and try to storm the village, killing other creatures in their path. If the drawbridge is raised, the orcs swim across the moat and try to climb the palisade, with no success. After being thwarted by the palisade, Gurrash sends scouts downriver to find another point of entry. It takes these orcs 10 minutes to realize that they can enter the village through the gap in the palisade where the bridge (area 11) leads up to the keep. Once the orcs enter the village, they fight to the death and don't take prisoners. Because the orcs don't know what they're up against, characters can try to hide in the village and pick off a few orcs at a time. They can also retreat to the keep, which the orcs ignore.

If the orcs lose more than half their number without gaining a foothold in the village, the survivors flee into the surrounding hills. Once the orcs are defeated, the characters can advance to 3rd level and head to the Dripping Caves to locate and retrieve the missing villagers. If they're not sure where the villagers went, Kella Darkhope or the guards in the keep can point them in the right direction.

Strange Bedfellows. If the characters came to terms with the Black Network in the previous event and the Seven Snakes are still around when the orcs arrive, the Zhents help the party defend Nightstone. Xolkin and Kella aren't heroes and don't place themselves in unnecessary danger, but they are quick to raise the drawbridge or position defenders on the watchtowers as needed. Knowing that orcs are devastating melee combatants, the Zhents favor ranged attacks and try to keep the orcs at a distance.

Elves to the Rescue! If the characters are in danger of being overwhelmed by War Chief Gurrash and his bloodthirsty orcs, eight elves of the Ardeep Forest (CG male and female wood elf **scouts**) arrive from the north to assist them. The leader of this band is a daring wood elf named Rond Arrowhome. He and his fellow elves have no love or respect for the residents of Nightstone, but they hate orcs more. Once the orcs are defeated, Rond yells out, "You're welcome!" before leading the elves back to the Ardeep Forest. The elves aren't looking to pick a fight or mend fences with Nightstone's inhabitants, and they aren't interested in any kind of reward.

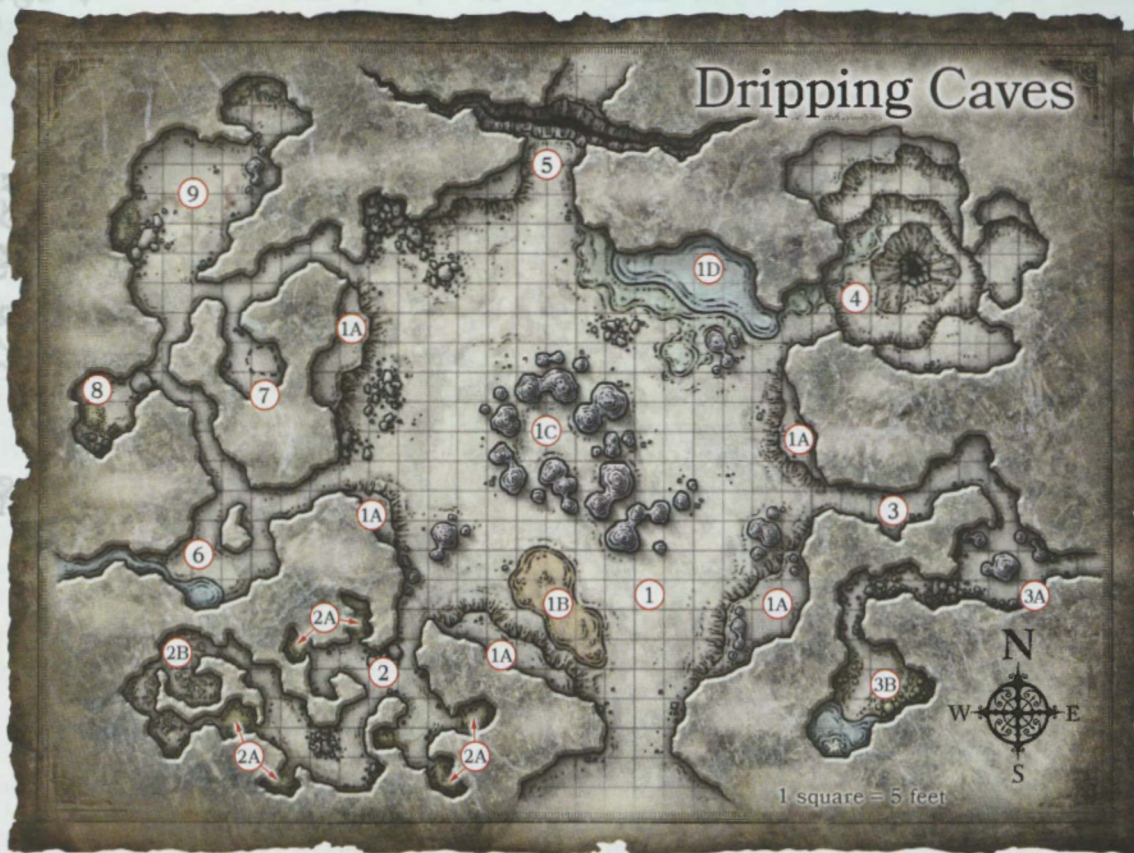
DRIPPING CAVES

The hills around Nightstone are riddled with caves. The villagers hid in the Dripping Caves, located a mile north of Nightstone, after the cloud giant attack. Characters who follow the villagers' tracks or are given directions discover a gaping cave mouth on the south face of a rocky hill topped with pine trees. Characters who use this entrance arrive in area 1 of the Dripping Caves.

If the characters take an hour to circle the hill, they find two other entrances. At the base of the hill, on the west side, is a narrow tunnel into which a stream flows. This tunnel is 40 feet long and leads to area 6. On the east side of the hill is a dry, 100-foot-long tunnel that gently slopes down to area 3a.

If the characters climb to the top of the hill and look around for other possible entrances, they find a natural chimney (a 5-foot-diameter shaft) that descends 50 feet to area 7. The chimney has abundant handholds and can be climbed with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. No ability check is required if the characters use a rope or climbing gear.

A goblin clan driven from the Ardeep Forest by wood elves took refuge in the Dripping Caves a little over a month ago. A week later, while scouring the hills for food, they befriended a mated pair of ogres and lured them to the caves for protection. The goblins and ogres captured the Nightstone refugees and have started eating the villagers. Prisoners that the goblins haven't eaten are doomed to meet a similar fate unless the adventurers intervene.



MAP 1.2: DRIPPING CAVES

Hark, the goblin boss, isn't an unreasonable creature. His instincts for self-preservation outweigh any natural animosity he feels toward his enemies or his prey. Characters can negotiate with Hark and avoid unnecessary bloodshed (see area 9), or they can kill Hark and his followers to win the villagers' freedom—the choice is theirs.

The characters should be 3rd level by the time they set foot in the Dripping Caves. Map 1.2 shows the caves' layout. The sections that follow describe locations on that map.

DRIPPING CAVES: GENERAL FEATURES

The Dripping Caves are naturally formed and have the following features in common.

Darkness. The Dripping Caves contain no light sources. The goblins and ogres rely on their darkvision to see.

Dripping Water. The caves get their name from the water that constantly drips from the stalactites in the main cavern (area 1). The sound of dripping water echoes throughout the complex but isn't loud enough to drown out other distinctive noises.

Narrow Tunnels. The tunnels leading away from the main cavern (area 1) are 7 to 8 feet high and range in width from 2 to 5 feet. Ogres and other Large creatures can squeeze through these passages, but they suffer the normal penalties for doing so (see the "Squeezing into a Smaller Space" section in chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook*).

Walls. The walls are damp and slick, but thanks to an abundance of handholds and footholds, they can be climbed with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

1. MAIN CAVERN

Characters who follow the villagers' tracks arrive at a yawning cave mouth, 12 feet wide and 20 feet high. Beyond the cave mouth is a vast cavern with a forest of stalagmites in its center and 10-foot-high ledges along its walls. Water drips from the stalactite-covered ceiling, which rises to a height of 30 feet in the middle of the cavern. Six naturally formed tunnels lead from this central cavern to other parts of the cave complex. The floor is littered with broken spears, broken shields, and drops of bat guano.

Characters who peer into the cave can see a male ogre bathing in a pool of mud (see area 1b). Those with darkvision can also see one or more goblin sentries on ledges (see area 1a). If the characters are carrying light sources or making a lot of noise, the creatures in areas 1a, 1b, and 1c detect them and attack.

1A. LEDGES

Ten-foot-high ledges of rock have formed along the walls of the cavern. Climbing up to a ledge or safely descending from one requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

Five **goblins** stand guard on the ledges—one on each ledge marked with a "1a" tag on the map. Their names are Gleek, Lop, Nitch, Pox, and Slibberdabber. When they detect intruders, the goblins cry out "Bree-yark!" and begin shooting arrows. Their cries of alarm put the rest of the cave complex on alert, but no reinforcements arrive.

1B. HOT MUD BATH

A male **ogre** named Nob bathes in a 5-foot-deep pool of hot mud near the cave entrance. The pool is heated by a natural vent that keeps the temperature of the mud around 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Nob doesn't carry any javelins but keeps his greatclub in the pool with him. The mud pool is considered difficult terrain.

Nob and his mate (see area 1c) work for Boss Hark, who browbeats them into service with his superior intellect and nasty disposition. Nob tries to crush enemies with his greatclub. If his enemies try to flee, Nob and his mate chase after them.

1C. STALAGMITE FOREST

A cluster of stalagmites has formed in the middle of the cavern. The stalagmites range in height from 3 to 15 feet. In the middle of the stalagmite "forest" is a clear space. The ogres have turned this space into a den, and a female **ogre** named Thog is sleeping here when the characters first arrive. She awakens to sounds of combat or cries of alarm, and either hurls javelins or wades into battle with her greatclub. A search of the ogres' den yields nothing of value.

1D. POLLUTED POOL

A shallow pool has formed against the northeast wall of the cavern, the floor of which is lower here. Runoff from the pool trickles eastward into area 4. The water is polluted with toxic minerals and is unfit for drinking.

2. GOBLIN WARRENS

A tunnel that the ogres find uncomfortably narrow leads to a cramped network of caves where the weakest members of the goblin tribe live. These goblins cower in their dens and avoid getting into fights with armed adventurers. If threatened, they cry and beg for mercy. Each has AC 10, 1 hit point, and no effective attacks.

2A. SLEEPING CAVES

Six of these caves are marked on the Dripping Caves map, and each one contains 1d6 goblin noncombatants. The floor of each cave is covered with a grass pallet on which the goblins sleep. Apart from a few rusty pots, odd tools, and goblin toys, the sleeping caves contain nothing of value.

2B. CAVE OF BONES

The goblins discard the bones of the creatures they devour here. The floor of the cave is littered with the bones of small animals (mostly bats) and a few unlucky humanoids, including some recently eaten villagers. A search of the area yields no treasure.

3. EAST CAVES

After a few unfortunate run-ins with the monster in area 3a, the goblins avoid this tunnel. The goblins refer to the monster as the Blob.

3A. THE BLOB

Stalactites and stalagmites crowd this 20-foot-high, 15-foot-wide cave. Rising up from the middle of the floor is a particularly large (10-foot-tall) stalagmite riddled

with 4-inch-wide, 12-inch-deep naturally formed holes that bore down into a hollow central cavity. Lying near the base of the stalagmite are the badly corroded remains of two goblin scimitars.

A **black pudding** has taken residence inside the stalagmite's hollow core, and the holes in the stalagmite's "shell" are wide enough that a character can stick an arm, a staff, or a weapon into any one of them. The pudding makes a free pseudopod attack against anything that is inserted into one of the stalagmite's holes.

The pudding has total cover while inside the stalagmite's core. If left undisturbed, the pudding remains inside the stalagmite until the characters make their way toward area 3b, whereupon it quietly emerges and follows them. Once the characters are trapped in area 3b, the pudding attacks.

East Tunnel. This 5-foot-wide, 7-foot-high tunnel slopes gently upward as it travels east. After 100 feet, it breaks through the east side of the hill.

3B. WATER SUPPLY

A small waterfall pouring from the 8-foot-high ceiling forms a 5-foot-deep pool at the southwest end of the cave. The goblins used to come here to drink fresh water, but they stopped visiting the cave when the black pudding in area 3a started picking them off.

Growing near the southeast wall is a patch of twenty green mushrooms. A character who inspects the mushrooms and succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check can ascertain that they are poisonous. Any creature that ingests a mushroom must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 1 poison damage and be poisoned for 1 hour. The effects of eating multiple mushrooms are cumulative.

4. BATS AND PRISONERS

A short tunnel leads to a sunken cavern that echoes with the sound of flapping wings. The sound emanates from a naturally formed pit in the cavern's floor, which is covered with bat guano. Ten-foot-high ledges surround the pit and form raised alcoves to the north, east, and south. Huddled in these alcoves are thirty Nightstone villagers. The villagers are prisoners of the goblins and ogres, and they are trying to remain as quiet as possible for reasons that might not be readily apparent to the characters.

Directly below this cavern is another similarly sized cavern filled with thousands of bats. Any loud noise in either cavern agitates the bats. When the bats become agitated, have the characters roll initiative. On initiative count 10, the bats fly up the pit and flutter about the upper cave, shrieking loudly. The fluttering bats reduce visibility in the upper cavern to 5 feet. A creature takes 1 piercing damage whenever it enters a 5-foot-square area filled with fluttering bats. At the start of each of the bats' turns, roll a d6. On a roll of 1–5, the bats remain agitated. On a roll of 6, the bats return to the lower cavern and are no longer agitated.

The pit descends through 20 feet of solid rock before opening into the lower cavern, which is 30 feet deep.

NIGHTSTONE VILLAGERS

Boss Hark stripped the villagers of their weapons before herding them into this cavern. The villagers fear for their lives but can't escape the Dripping Caves until the monsters in area 1 are defeated. Every few hours, one of the ogres enters the cave, grabs a prisoner, and takes the unfortunate villager away to be eaten (if not by the ogres, then by the goblins in area 2 or the giant rats in area 9).

In the absence of a true leader, **Morak Ur'gray** (LG male shield dwarf **commoner**), the owner and proprietor of the Nightstone Inn, speaks on behalf of the villagers. Morak is an optimist, and he's counting on Lady Velrosa Nandar coming to the rescue. When he lays eyes on the adventurers, he breathes a sigh of relief and assumes they were hired by Lady Nandar. (He would be dismayed to learn that she didn't survive the attack on Nightstone.)

Other noteworthy prisoners trapped in the cavern include **Hiral Mystrum** (LG male Tethyrian human **commoner**), the village's cowardly priest of Lathander, and six unarmed guards (LN male and female **guards** of various ethnicities). The guards were wounded by the goblins and ogres in the process of being captured; each has only 1d6 hit points remaining.

The other prisoners found here are surviving members of local families. All the adults are unarmed **commoners**, and all the children are noncombatants. They let Morak speak on their behalf. The families are as follows:

Agganor Family. Destiny Agganor (age 42) is Nightstone's tiefling midwife. Her son, Grin Agganor (age 27), worked in the village's stable house, feeding the horses and cleaning the stalls for Lady Nandar. Destiny worships Asmodeus but doesn't impose her beliefs on anyone else, including her son.

Delfryndel Family. The Delfryndels are Tethyrian humans. They own and operate Nightstone's windmill. The surviving family members are Renarra Delfryndel (age 64), her youngest son Zalf (age 40), his wife Elize (age 37), and their two adolescent children, Darson (age 17) and Hildy (age 14). No family members died in the giant attack, but Renarra's eldest son, Olaf, was killed and eaten by the goblins.

Hulvaarn Family. The Hulvaarns are Damaran human potato and turnip farmers. The surviving family members are Godrick Hulvaarn (age 32), his wife Prennis (age 30), and their three children: daughter Jehanna (age 12) and twin sons Ellis and Ghalt (age 9). The children lost their grandfather (Godrick's father, Nestor) in the giant attack on Nightstone.

Nesper Family. The Nespers are Tethyrian human pumpkin and squash farmers. None of them were killed in the giant attack, but three of them died at the hands of the goblins and ogres in the Dripping Caves. The remaining family members are Yondra (age 15) and her brother Sarvin (age 11). They lost both of their parents and an older sister named Sylva.

Osstra Family. The Osstras are Tethyrian human wheat farmers. The surviving family members include Thelbin Osstra (age 52) and his husband, Brynn (age 52), and their good-hearted nephew, Broland (age 23).

Brynn lost his elderly mother and younger sister (Broland's mother) to the goblins.

Summerhawk Family. The Summerhawks are strongheart halflings. Taela Summerhawk (age 28), an apothecary, comforts her four young children, Barley (age 10), Midge (age 8), Nincy (age 6), and Dollop (age 3). Taela's husband, Larlow, was killed in Nightstone when a rock fell on their house.

5. FISSURE

An 8-foot-wide, 20-foot-deep fissure splits a tunnel leading north. The goblins won't cross the fissure and haven't explored the tunnel. Where the tunnel leads is up to you. It might break the surface at some point, or it might lead to a monster's lair or the Ardeep Forest. If you don't want the characters wandering too far afield, inform the players that the tunnel collapsed after a few hundred feet, forcing the characters to turn back.

6. UNDERGROUND STREAM

An ankle-deep stream of water pours through a narrow tunnel in the west wall and forms a small pool in this otherwise empty cave. The water doesn't taste good because of its high mineral content, but the goblins have been forced to drink it because their supply of fresh water has been cut off (see area 3).

If the characters enter the caves undetected and take refuge here, there's a 50 percent chance each hour that a goblin noncombatant enters the cave, looking for a drink of water. The goblin flees at the sight of intruders, heading north to area 9. The goblin has AC 10, 1 hit point, and no effective attacks.

7. NATURAL CHIMNEY

A chimney has formed in the 7-foot-high ceiling of this small side cave. The chimney is 5 feet wide and has abundant handholds and footholds. A creature can climb up or down the shaft with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. No ability check is required if a rope or climbing gear is used.

An unscrupulous and ambitious **goblin** named Snigbat stands guard at the bottom of the shaft. Snigbat's job is to watch for intruders and report what she sees to Boss Hark. Snigbat considers this duty a form of punishment. If she sees one or more well-armed adventurers, Snigbat offers to lead them to Boss Hark if they promise to kill Hark and help Snigbat become the new boss. Snigbat knows where Hark keeps his treasure (area 8) but doesn't share this information with the characters in the hopes that she might get it.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters form an alliance with Snigbat and dispose of Hark, Snigbat asks them to slay the ogres in the main cavern (area 1), since she has no influence over them. With Hark and the ogres dead, Snigbat can seize the title of boss without being challenged. Once she becomes the new boss, she allows the characters and the villagers of Nightstone to leave the Dripping Caves unharmed.

8. HARK'S HOARD

A large round rock fills the low, 4-foot-diameter tunnel leading to this cave. The boulder fits snugly in the tunnel and must be pushed into the cave to clear the passage. Moving the boulder out of the way requires a successful DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check. The sound of the rolling boulder is loud enough to be heard by the creatures in area 9.

The cave has an 8-foot-high ceiling and contains a grass pallet (Hark's bed), next to which rests a battered wooden chest with a rusty lock. The lock is purely for show and falls apart if handled roughly.

TREASURE

The chest contains the treasure that Boss Hark has amassed in his short lifetime:

- 12 gp, 55 sp, and 87 cp (loose)
- A matching pair of silver salt and pepper shakers (worth 10 gp apiece or 25 gp for the pair)
- A bloodstained leather case containing a complete set of thieves' tools (worth 25 gp)
- A holy symbol of Silvanus carved from wood and inlaid with gold (worth 25 gp)
- One magic item, determined randomly by rolling on Magic Item Table A in chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*

9. BOSS HARK'S CAVE

This 10-foot-high cave contains Hark, the **goblin boss**, two female **goblins** (bodyguards) named Ratcha and Zukluk, and seven **giant rats** (Hark's beloved pets). When the characters enter the cave for the first time, Hark and his bodyguards are gleefully watching the rats feed on the corpse of a slain villager (Darthag Ulgar, the proprietor of the Lionshield Coster trading post).

Hark has collected all the weapons and shields belonging to the captured villagers and stashed the equipment in a western alcove behind rocks. Characters who search the cache find nine spears, five clubs, two daggers, and six wooden shields.

HARK'S LARDER

At the north end of the cave is a smaller cave where Boss Hark keeps prisoners before feeding them to his giant rats. Cowering in the back of this 6-foot-high larder is Lady Velrosa Nandar's terrified lady-in-waiting, Daphne Featherstone (LG female Tethyrrian human **commoner**). Daphne was in the village when the cloud giants attacked. Unable to make it back to Nandar Keep, Daphne fled to the Dripping Caves with the other villagers—a decision she has come to regret. If she learns that Lady Nandar is dead, Daphne becomes inconsolable.

DEALING WITH HARK

Characters can try to negotiate with Hark instead of attacking him. He agrees to release the remaining villagers if the characters do one of the following things (and leave the goblin lair in peace):

- Pay a ransom of 1 gold piece per villager. (The total amount is 31 gp, minus 1 gp for each villager who has died since the characters arrived at the caves.)

- Give Hark a working lock. Hark needs the new lock for his treasure chest in area 8.
- Kill the Blob (see area 3). If the characters provide Hark with proof of the black pudding's demise, he releases all the villagers into their custody.

MORAK'S QUEST

Characters who survive the perils of the Dripping Caves and return to Nightstone should advance to 4th level.

Once he is safely back in the village, Morak Ur'gray takes stock of the damage, makes arrangements to deliver news of the giants' attack to Waterdeep, and urges the characters to undertake one of the following three quests. If Morak died in the Dripping Caves, another NPC can give the quest in his place. Choose whichever quest you like. Your choice will determine whether the characters visit Bryn Shander, Goldenfields, or Triboar in the next leg of the adventure (see chapter 2).

Whether or not the characters accept Morak's quest, continue with the "Tower of Zephyros" section.

BRYN SHANDER QUEST

Morak's friend and neighbor, Semile Southwell, was killed in the giant attack. Although she had no family in Nightstone, Semile spoke often about her brother, Markham. Morak knows that Markham is the sheriff of Bryn Shander and asks the characters to travel to Icewind Dale and deliver the sad news of Semile's passing.

GOLDENFIELDS QUEST

The Xelbrins were killed in their home when the giants bombarded the village (see "Nightstone," area 4h). Morak recalls that the elderly couple had a son, Miros, who lives in Goldenfields. Morak asks the characters to visit Goldenfields and let Miros know what has happened. If the Xelbrins' tressym is still alive, Morak asks the characters to deliver it safely to Miros.

TRIBOAR QUEST

Morak's friend and neighbor, Darthag Ulgar, was eaten by giant rats. Darthag ran the Lionshield Coster trading post in Nightstone, and his ex-wife runs a similar trading post in Triboar. Morak asks the characters to travel to Triboar and deliver the sad news of Darthag's passing to Alaestra Ulgar.

TOWER OF ZEPHYROS

The day after the characters accept Morak's quest, they have their first encounter with a giant. Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the players:

You see an enormous tower floating on a billowy cloud a thousand feet overhead. The tower must be hundreds of feet tall, and its spire looks strangely like a pointy wizard's hat. As the tower drifts closer, stairs made of clouds begin to form underneath it and descend toward you.