

Tinevria's Rift

History and Lore

Ancient legends tell the story of the goddess Tinevria, a fierce yet compassionate deity who typically lived harmoniously with the denizens of this land, located near the heart of the continent Alarius. She protected them from droughts, famine, severe weather and other natural phenomena, and is known for bestowing a great many blessings on the massive lake at the core of this land, the **Tinevramar** (Elvish for "the home of the forever-brilliant one"), which was later bastardized into the Common tongue name, "**Ever Mere**" as it is widely known today. It was said that Tinevria frequented the lake so often, many thought it was her home.

Another legend tells the story of the inhabitants of the human city of Cassia, haughty with their own greatness, who took excessive advantage of the great lake, fishing out every creature therein for food and sport. Tinevria implored they reconsider their ways, offered them blessings on their farmlands, and when they still refused demanded they cease their wanton ways. Still, they prospered, and the city filled with wealthy nobles, who in turn would take other creatures such as dwarves, elves and even goblins and enslave them. When the masters tired of a slave, or when they ceased being compliant, the masters would attach a great boulder to the slave's feet and drown them in the Ever Mere.

This practice drew the great ire of Tinevria, protector of all creatures in her lands (it is said that in her great mercy, Tinevria did not allow these slaves to die, but instead made them grow gills; this is the legend of how the first Sahuagin fish-folk of the kingdom of Tal-Hugann were created). In her anger, Tinevria rent the land in twain, sending the city of Cassia toppling to the bottom of the Ever Mere and causing the tremendous fissure now known across the continent as The Great Divide. This is also whence the general vicinity got its name, Tinevria's Rift. Not long after, it is said that Tinevria regretted her impulsive punishment and proceeded to cry for one hundred years; the locals will confirm that this is the origin of the eponymous waterfall, Tinevria's Tears, which continually fills the lake. Since then, no one has documented any sightings of the goddess in her once-frequented lands, leading most to think she abandoned her failed charge.

While today's most learned scholars cast doubt on the story of the formation of the Great Divide as the actions of a brash goddess, suggesting various geological phenomena as the cause, lately there have been discoveries of a sunken city in the eastern reaches of the Ever Mere, with characteristics that match the descriptions of the legendary city of Cassia.

Settlements

The most important settlement in the region has certainly become the city of **New Cassia**. It is a major fishing, shipping and trading hub for the entire region. It is also the major hub for goods transported across the famous **Sky Bridge**. New Cassia is a prosperous town, though like its namesake is fairly human-centric, with other races, especially gnomes and halflings, living in poor conditions.

Across a large expanse of farmland lie the sister towns of **Elevi** and **Abbasi**. The two are connected across the Great Divide by a technological wonder known as the **Sky Bridge**. The Sky Bridge connects the highland to the lowland via a system of ropes and chains that suspend aerial carriages meant for carrying people, consumer products, and basic resources such as food, water and other natural materials.

South of New Cassia by about 250 miles lies the city of **Lorica**, deep in the heart of fertile wetlands surrounding the Nurinda River. Lorica is not nearly as large or populous as New Cassia, but is still the second largest city in the Rift. It is largely a way station for boats sailing down the Nurinda River, but generates some of its own economic value. Lorica does boast a much greater diversity of inhabitants, and rarely one might find a passing druid of Ngin'th or an envoy from Khurda (one would not see the likes of either of them in New Cassia).

East of the Ever Mere atop the overlooking cliffs rests a massive assemblage of tents and other impermanent dwellings which has come to be known as **The Encampment**. This lies directly on the path of the **Wanderer's Way**, a well known trail for nomads and wanderers making their way through the region. Over time, the nomads banded together and formed what could be termed as a "village" though with no form of government. As time went on, the "village" grew to be a large "city" but maintained its lack of structure or political body. It is rumored that there is a core junta of clan leaders that actually controls everything behind the scenes, but the apparent truth is that it is an every-man-for-himself type of society (of course, the social structure is highly patriarchal). Another rumor is that many nomads from the Encampment will dive amidst the ruins of the **Sunken City of Cassia** to find priceless treasures and artifacts, sometimes bartering them away for far less than their true worth.

In the Southeast of Tinevria's Rift lies the Dwarven city of **Khurda**, nestled in a valley surrounded by mountains and the Bhargaven Hills. The dwarves of Khurda are typically very insular, and have a history of aggression to their neighbors. Still, it is well known that their craftsmanship is unparalleled, so they are a fairly wealthy populace.

North of Khurda lies a druid outpost known as **Ngin'th**. Interestingly, the inhabitants also do not take kindly to outsiders, so very little is known about this settlement. What little is known is reported from travelers passing through the region; most who enter the outpost do not survive

the encounter, but others who simply passed by have reported witnessing strange rituals with trees and other plant life.

The Western half of the Ever Mere is where the **Sahuagin Kingdom of Tal-Hugann** is located. The Sahuagin, or fish-folk, are typically a private civilization. It is uncertain when they started inhabiting the Ever Mere, but the very few pre-Cassian records that exist make no mention of them. This dearth of knowledge lends credence to the legends of how they came to be; most people regard the legends as fact, and as such have built up a xenophobia and even hatred of them.

The kingdom of Tal-Hugann is thought to extend as far east as the Marionspire, though no one knows for certain (any explorers that have attempted to map out the borders of the Sahuagin kingdom have not returned). It is rumored that the fish-folk fear getting too close to the powerful vortex of magic.

Other rumors about the Sahuagin include the existence of an underwater city made entirely out of pearl, and that they have been occasionally suspected of stealing children in the middle of the night (some local parents tell their children horror stories of Franken the Fish-man who does so, in an attempt to get them to behave).

Economics

The Sky Bridge is likely the single most influential factor in the Rift's economics. Since the region has access to ample natural resources, trade and shipping (local, regional and even inter-regional) industries naturally need to exist. However, because of the massive escarpment that is the Great Divide, over 1000 miles total in length, as well as several natural features in the lowlands (namely the Fading Forest and the Loriccan marshlands), it would be prohibitive to ship anything "the long way" around the Divide.

Several hundred years ago, a great wizard devised the system that he would eventually build into the Sky Bridge, and imbued it with powerful magic that has continued operating to this day.

The wizard's students and their disciples maintained the contraption, and eventually formed the Divide Trading Company to administer the operation of the Sky Bridge. Needless to say, they all became extremely wealthy. As time has gone on, the system has been expanded to include several tracks supporting multiple aerial carriages.

These tracks are primarily divided by purpose: transporting people, commercial goods transport and bulk resources transport. The DTC taxes the usage of these tracks differently. person transport is typically only affordable to the middle class (about once a week) or wealthier (once or multiple times a day). Bulk resources, such as wood from the Loriccan logging industry or

stone from the highland quarries, are taxed by weight (they typically weigh the most anyway) and commercial goods are taxed by volume (carriage space is at a premium).

Although they each operate and administer half of the Sky Bridge, the sister towns of **Elevi and Abbasi** are very different. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the socioeconomics of the two towns conform to their topological placement on the Divide. Elevi is mostly a very wealthy, spread out town, with nobles and rich merchants having built expansive villas at the edge of the Divide (they say the views of the Ever Mere are spectacular; on a clear day you can even see the Marionspire). In contrast, Abbasi is mostly poor-, working- and middle-class residents working as traders or stevedores preparing cargo for shipment to destinations beyond. Another interesting distinction is that Abbasi has no walls, whereas Elevi is walled and defensible; this is likely the outcome of centuries of socioeconomic disparity (plus the proximity of New Cassia).

New Cassia, a central shipping hub (and itself a very large city) is often the first stop from Abbasi, where cargo is often loaded onto trading vessels sailing down the Nurinda River. New Cassia supports an expansive farming industry (with over 6000 square miles of farms!) and fishing industry (catches in the Ever Mere are bountiful) which supply food for much of the region east of the Nurinda River. Of course, commerce and shipping are also a tremendous industry in New Cassia; some boats travel as far south as Hatchet Bay, and even a few all the way to Pashmir in the Shifting Sands region. It is often said, "What there is to be found, is found in New Cassia."

Lorica does sustain some moderate farming, and fishing to a smaller extent, but its main industries are shipping (and services for vessels in transport) and logging.

Military Conflicts

Though Tinevria's Rift is a large area, there are only two major military tensions of note in the region (there are certainly ample minor and local conflicts, but none involving major region-impacting military action).

The first is the conflict between the New Cassians and the Sahuagin. As New Cassia resides on the edge of the Ever Mere, and much of their livelihood depends on the great lake, the New Cassians have always attempted to further their reach to establish new fishing and shipping routes. Eventually, they began to cross into the Kingdom of Tal-Hugann, which was met with swift action by the Sahuagin. This led to an escalation in tensions and attacks from both sides, which eventually led to a full-scale attack by Tal-Hugann on New Cassia.

Since the attack came from the lake-side, the city's fortified walls were unable provide any defense, and much destruction was wrought on the city's marina and docks (though the Sahuagin did not press further inland, even though they possessed the advantage).

This led to a panic by the New Cassians, who sought to be aware of potential threats from Tal-Hugann. A network of signal towers was built around the Ever Mere, culminating with **Fort Igizia**, at the mouth of the Nurinda River. Fort Igizia is said to be impenetrable, and also is the primary base for the New Cassian fleet of warships (this doubles as protection for trading vessels sailing down the river). This network even extended as far south as Khurda, who once came to the aid of New Cassia (prior to their own local conflicts and ensuing isolationism).

While no formal records exist to indicate their effectiveness, oral tradition maintains that the signal tower network has prevented numerous attacks from the Sahuagin, and that the New Cassian fleet has successfully kept the invaders at bay. Regional pride in the city's naval prowess has remained high, leading to ample funding from the regional taxes.

The other major military conflict worth noting is that of the dwarves of Khurda with their neighboring region, the Ensorcelled Wood. It is said that a powerful dark sorcerer inhabits a tower and controls that entire forest with his evil magics. Details are scarce as to what precipitated conflict with the Khurdan dwarves over a hundred years ago, but it is known that they mounted a campaign to assault the Ensorcelled Wood and flush out the sorcerer.

The planned attack was on a massive scale; Khurda had summoned allies from across the continent and formed an enormous front to close in around the western edge of the Wood simultaneously. As they plunged deeper into the forest, battling the sorcerer's minions, they eventually became ensnared by the living trees and vines. Once entangled, the sorcerer commanded the western wood to conflagrate, burning the entire allied army alive. The remains are a barren wasteland known as **Mordahr's Folly** after the Khurdan general that led them to their demise.

Since then, the Khurdan dwarves have kept to themselves, never again daring to interact with their neighbors in the region.

Despite only two major regional conflicts, Tinevria's Rift is still a dangerous place to live outside of the organized cities, towns and villages. Monsters and bandits roam the countryside, preying on traders and travelers. Kidnappings and murder are not uncommon. Most try not to think about the horrors of what lies beyond their city walls, but nearly everyone has somehow been affected by some of the harsh realities of living in the Rift.

Natural Features

The **Alennau Forest** is an unremarkable pine forest in the northern highlands, abutting the cliff edge east of the waterfall **Tinevria's Tears**. It is known to be the home of several communities of Wood Elves.

The **Crag of Hitu'ku'urri'majann**, often known as the **Crag of Hikurrima** for short, is the north-eastern highland mountain range which is actually an extension of the very southern section of the Hoarfrost Range. The mountains are resource-rich, so many mining villages and quarries dot the landscape; there are even caches of precious gems and gold to be found scattered throughout. However, the Crag is also known for their treachery: both as a geological danger (the mountain peaks and slopes are very unforgiving) as well as great and terrifying creatures that live there. It is said that the legendary silver dragon Barushan's lair is deep in the heart of one of the mountains.

Southeast of the Crag are a font of geysers that endlessly spew steam from deep underground. These have come to be known as **Barushan's Nostrils** after the legendary dragon.

The **Murdenn Hills** area in the southeastern highlands of the Rift is home to a vibrant halfling community. Some dwarves live there as well, though they bear no relation or connection to the dwarves of the Bhargaven Hills.

The **Ever Mere** is the central feature of Tinevria's Rift. It is over five hundred miles at its widest point. Aside from the lore about this massive lake, it is undeniable that the waters are truly blessed; there are copious sea creatures and mostly calm waters. In one way or another, every settlement in Tinevria's Rift is sustained by the Ever Mere. The lake is filled at the waterfall known as **Tinevria's Tears** and drained by the **Nurinda River** to the south. Its northeast corner is a rocky, shallow area known to be treacherous to sailing vessels, colloquially termed **Tinevria's Teeth**.

Most notable about the Ever Mere however is the **Marionspire** at its heart. This is a swirling vertical spout of water that reaches thousands of feet into the air. It is known to be fueled by extremely powerful magic, and that there are great sea creatures that protect it. No one has ever returned from any voyage that passed too close to the Marionspire, though many adventurers and treasure hunters have tried.

South of the Ever Mere is **The Ensorcelled Wood**. Its name derives from the dark sorcerer who resides in a lone tower therein and wields power over the entire forest. It is known that passage through the wood is impossible - reports suggest that as one enters the forest deeper and deeper, the light is extinguished further and most do not find their way back out again. Part of this forest was destroyed in a conflict with Khurda (see Military Conflicts).

The **Starless Marsh**, located just southwest of Lorica over the Nurinda River, is as its name suggests. Unlike the natural swamps that surround it, this area is perpetually shrouded in darkness, even on the brightest days. Sightings of undead or other foul creatures here are not uncommon.

The **Fading Southeast of New Cassia is where the Forest**, southeast of New Cassia, is so named because half the forest always appears to be in a permanent is located - so named because the northern half of the forest is perpetually locked in a hazy state of semi-existence. Rumors abound of adventurers that tried to pass through the forest who stayed too long and simply faded out of existence.

Within the southern half Fading Forest is located **Aganna's Mortar**, a crater full of water (despite no nearby water source other than rainfall). How and when it was formed is unknown, though some scholars suggest that due to the barren treelines surrounding, some sort of destructive force may have been involved.

The **Hatori Forest**, located directly east of the Ever Mere, is where the Forest Tribes reside. The Forest Tribes are tree-dwellers with their own languages. There are at least five known tribes; their relationship with each other is unknown. What is known is that there is a central temple in the middle of the forest where all the tribes come to worship.

The **Rhinna Matorral**, located in the western reaches of Tinevria's Rift, is an expansive shrubland. Various small communities and hamlets exist there, mostly shepherds, though the settlement of Ngin'th there is known as a druid outpost.

The **Bhargaven Hills** in the furthest southwest reaches is home to the dwarven city of Khurda, as well as many smaller dwarven communities in the surrounding area. The inhabitants usually keep to themselves, though a scarce few have been known to venture as far north as Ngin'th and as far east as Lorica.

Other Features

Within the western marshes of the Nurinda River stands the **Cairn of the One-Eyed Hag**. This structure has existed for at least a millennium, possibly more. Ancient tribes of witches and bog hags that live nearby claim that the One-Eyed Hag opposed the dark sorcerer of the Ensorcelled Woods, and even long after her death, her cairn keeps his power at bay and localized to the forest.

Passing through the Rift highlands runs a well-worn path known as the **Wanderer's Way**. Every year, many nomads and wanderers follow this path around the Crags of Hikurrima and the Murdenn Hills to pass through the highlands. The Wanderer's Way also passes through The

Encampment, where many travelers sojourn, some of them indefinitely. Some say that the nomads who follow the Wanderer's Way are simply homeless travelers, seeking to find their way to a better life. Others say that they are pilgrims on a long journey that, for those that make it, culminates far to the south in Ras Allanin within the Shifting Sands region of Alarius.

On the northern edge of the cliffs of the Great Divide sits the **Dujirr Monastery**. This is a home to monks that to this day worship the goddess Tinevria. These monks, the Dujirri, see themselves as the interim guardians of the Ever Mere until such time that Tinevria returns to the region, heals the Great Divide and reunites the Rift once and for all.