

Tiamat's Coup

At an unknown point in history, the dragon goddess Tiamat had a consort named Delgaer. But Delgaer, though ancient, was mortal, and on his deathbed he fled from Tiamat's arms. Feeling betrayed, Tiamat's bitterness grew, particularly with the other gods who seemed not to care for mortal life.

Gathering a force of dragons to her, Tiamat planned to overthrow the other gods and seize control of Norastern, ruling the mortals and protecting the remains of Delgaer. At the right moment, Tiamat's army was launched, and war came to the material planes.

Tiamat had five lieutenants, each a powerful member of the five chromatic dragon races. Each began to scour a corner of Norastern, subjugating mortals and slaughtering those who resisted. And many did resist, calling on their gods to save them from Tiamat's greed. In the Upper Planes, the good gods heard the pleas of their mortal worshippers. Belenus was the first to take up arms, and many soon followed in the hopes of defeating Tiamat.

The alliance of gods was led by Belenus, with Eldath, Forsetti, Haela, Lliira, Moradin, and Tymora joining him. Together they descended on Norastern, inspiring the mortals to continue fighting on.

With strength of will and the help of their gods, the mortals began to shift the tide of the war. The dragon lieutenants began to grow decadent in the long war, taking their control for granted. One by one they were slain, leaving Tiamat alone against the gods. With Belenus leading the charge, a lengthy battle ensued, carving valleys and pushing up mountains, which ended with the defeat of Tiamat.

Belenus hobbled Tiamat and sealed her within Avernus. The souls of her lieutenants, embodying the strength of each chromatic race which gave Tiamat her power, in five dragon orbs and scattered them. Now too weak to cause anymore trouble, Tiamat waits for a champion to free her, whispering in the ears of mortals and trying to corrupt them. The other gods went their separate ways, but a new balance of power had been established with Belenus as the most influential and avenging of the gods.

Immortal Sparks

With the evil gods on the backfoot, the trickster Mask began to seek a way to expand his own power. He settled on the goddess Lliira, perceived as weak because of her limited domain of the sun. Planning for a century beyond the watchful gaze of Belenus, Mask slowly prepared for his attack. If he could ambush and destroy Lliira, he could absorb her immortal spark and become infinitely more powerful.

When he finally struck, Lliira was nearly slain outright. It was only through her own determination and the intervention of Belenus that she survived. Mask fought viciously, but as Belenus joined the brawl, he was quickly outnumbered. In retribution, Belenus ripped half of Mask's spark from his form, banishing what remained to his home in the Shadowfell. There he

covered and grew bitter, licking his wounds and thinking up new schemes to regain his lost power.

Belenus granted the stolen piece of Mask's spark to Lliira to heal her. Empowered by the spark and guided by Belenus, Lliira became much more powerful, growing to encompass the domain of light as well as the sun. Now the two of them often stand together strike down evil whenever it threatens the Upper Planes.

The Triton Empire

Under the leadership of their enlightened kings and queens, the Triton race spread rapidly through the seas of Norastern, eventually forming a massive empire. The hydromancy inherited by those of royal blood made them capable of shaping the waters to construct beautiful and mechanically intricate cities.

On shore, many other races were still struggling to survive. Then the Tritons came, sharing their knowledge of magic, their technology, and importantly their civics. The other races began to settle into civilized polities, laying the groundwork for many of today's settlements. Fountains of magic water established by Triton engineers can still be seen dotted around Norastern.

The Tritons drew power from their comrades in the Elemental Plane of Water. Portals between the planes were plentiful, and trade flowed as freely as water through a river. It was perhaps inevitable that as the Triton royalty expanded their hydromancy through the power of the Plane of Water, they drew on dangerous magic.

The capital of the Triton Empire was the city of Awenada, a great metropolis full of scholars and home to the royal palace. One feature of Awenada was its magical barriers which could be set-up as a bulwark against outside threats. So when a planar rip opened up and a monstrosly large leviathan tore its way through the Triton cities, the barrier was activated.

This proved to be Awenada's undoing, because while the leviathan could not enter, nobody inside could leave. For a year, the leviathan destroyed Triton civilization as the world knew it, leaving ruins littering the bed of the Triton Sea. The royal family was able to escape by opening a portal to the Plane of Water, but the rest of Awenada's populace was left to slowly starve to death. The final blow was struck when the leviathan attacked the city, cracking its foundations and leaving it sunken into a deep chasm in the seafloor.

After its rampage and unable to find its way to its home plane, the leviathan settled and entered a long sleep. Inside the city, only one lone Triton managed to survive, teaching herself hydromancy through the knowledge of the royal archives, though the process and the isolation wore on her sanity. This mage was named Ashkii.

The Tempest

As the years past, civilization flourished on dry ground. In particular, the high elves built a number of magically advanced petty kingdoms, occasionally skirmishing with the powerful

Windwall dwarven kingdom. Gnomes, halflings, wood elves, and snow elves all established communities. And on the southern peninsula, humans constantly fought one another.

Eventually, the halflings and wood elves formed the Republic of Rivercross to defend against the dwarves. Humans in the area seized their opportunity during the ensuing instability and transformed the state into the Kingdom of Rivercross, placing the crown on their own heads. Not long after, their cousins to the south followed suit, forming the Kingdom of Seasplit. And it was then that The Tempest struck.

The mad mage Ashkii was desperate to escape her underwater prison, and having gathered enough power to launch her plan, began awakening the leviathan in the hopes it could destroy Awenada and release her. The leviathan was wakened, but disobeyed Ashkii and coursed through the seas looking for ships and sea monsters to attack.

The leviathan's actions caused a great wave to sweep Norastern, drowning half of Seasplit permanently and wrecking every city within sight of the coast. This would be known as The Tempest, leaving the continent in shambles for years to come.

In the wake of the flood, Seasplit lost so much land that it turned its eyes north for new opportunities of expansion. The wood elf cities were weakened, and Rivercross grew defensive and standoffish to its neighbours. Windwall lost a colony to the seas, and the beginning of the dwarvish decline could be noted. Once again, the leviathan settled into some dark nook of the ocean and entered its slumber.

Seasplit's Years of Conquest

During The Tempest, a new royal dynasty rose in the Kingdom of Seasplit: house Penrose. King Amos Penrose I oversaw the crisis with wisdom and characteristic resignation. Upon the King's death, his son, King Amos Penrose II, took a notably more proactive approach to ruling.

Amos II directed his kingdom's expansion in-land, since The Tempest had wrecked many settlements and lost Seasplit the majority of its territory. Seasplit's neighbours, the high elf states, became the first target. Human armies, morale brimming thanks to the dream of building an empire that Amos II espoused, swept over the high elves.

Within years the borders of Seasplit reached The Corridor. The high elves took poorly to their subjugation, and after a number of rebellions, thousands of elves were put to the sword, nearly wiping out high elves as a race and leaving their numbers dwindling. Many other refugees fled from Seasplit rule, including a large number of gnomes; these refugees would go on to found the cities of Nuladulawink and Nevermind.

Next were the dwarves and Rivercross, both in the midst of enough political turmoil for Seasplit to overwhelm them. In a series of long sieges over generations of Seasplit kings, the present border along the Drabhelm region was established. King Atlas I led what was meant to be a devastating invasion force against the dwarves in the hope of subjugating Windwall. Instead, a freak snowstorm tore through his force as it marched north from Death's Door, leaving the invasion in shambles and killing Atlas I.

This marked the end of the Seasplit conquests, though some wounds were not healed. Cities in The Corridor and near the Hollow Mountains rose in revolt, forcing subsequent kings of Seasplit to focus on internal affairs. High elves were rooted out wherever they tried to settle, and the kingdom's only officially approved god was established at sword point as Belenus.

Norastern Today

After a number of wars between Seasplit and Rivercross competing for the lands between them, Norastern has settled into an awkward time of peace, though threats from the wilderness keep town guards and mercenaries as busy as ever. The western half of the continent has avoided war for nearly a century. Wise kings of Seasplit and Windwall have focused on fostering learning and wealth in their lands, rather than expanding.

Wood and snow elf culture is flourishing, and their cities are beginning to grow into regional powers. The gnomes of Nuladulawink are known as the richest traders in the world, and gold flows through endlessly through their city. Even the wildest orcs have found some calm and put down roots in their own settlements.

The east is more turbulent. The Kingdom of Rivercross disintegrated not long ago, returning to the republic it once was, but leaving a power vacuum filled by bitter noble families who are still very influential in the new Commonwealth. In the cliffside city of Nevermind, the Stormcrafters have developed into a modernized, technologically-advanced society. With new weapons and lofty ideals, some of their numbers begin to look for new lands to conquer.

Aside from politics, the nature of Norastern makes it a target for many extraplanar entities. The leylines of magic in Norastern pulse stronger than many other worlds on the Material Plane which attracts unwanted attention. Many mages from Norastern have also opened cracks between the planes for their own ends, leaving the continent vulnerable.

Almost by accident, Norastern finds itself in an era of overseas exploration. After civilization was discovered on the island of Monoakeeta, several adventurers have been taking to the water in an attempt to chart the undiscovered lands of the Triton Sea.

Nations, States, and In Between

Seasplit

The Kingdom of Seasplit is a fairly new country, yet in its short lifetime has earned an infamous reputation. Many non-human races see Seasplit as the embodiment of human ambition gone unchecked.

The seat of power is Skyfall Keep in Southwatch, home of the well-established royal Penrose dynasty. King Atlas Penrose IV currently sits the throne, regarded for his shrewd judgement and firm justice. To the north-east of the Estbelt lay a number of marches, cities left to their own devices and given a measure of freedom compared to the southern and western territories. The lands closer to the capital bear the brunt of royal tax collectors and inquisitors, the latter enforcing Seasplit's strict worship of Belenus as the prime deity.

Seasplit is the largest and most powerful state in the world, though it often keeps itself too busy with internal crises to threatened the other nations. Like any large country ruling a multi-ethnic population, Seasplit finds itself dealing with revolutionaries, heathens, and inefficient power projection on a regular basis.

The lands of Seasplit proper are covered in fertile grasslands and forests, perfect terrain for the Goldskin Lion mounts that have become a symbol of the kingdom. The Ostbelt and Estbelt hem the kingdom in with their mountains. To the east are drylands, near the Hollow Mountains, and north of that wetter, swampy climates. The cold of the Frostfield touches the northern cities of Seasplit, leaving them with little farmland and biting winters.

Rivercross

Once an autocratic kingdom ruled by humans, the Commonwealth of Rivercross has returned to its roots as a republic of halfings and wood elves. Its long history stretches back for centuries, making Rivercross a resilient nation which has survived the worst time could throw at it. The republic is still finding its footing, and many citizens would do not care who rules them have been openly disobedient.

The Commonwealth estates gather at Blackward Castle in Reedband, the traditional capital. Each head of a noble family sits at a meeting of the estates, as well as several religious leaders and the mayors of various cities. One noble stands out: Ava Fitzroffer, who just before the old king died inherited all the crownlands and some land retracted from other nobles. Her history is unclear, but she uses her influence to stamp out resistance and hold Rivercross together.

Rivercross is the clear regional power, with close trading ties to the wood elves cities. The Stormcrafters are allied to the Commonwealth, but whether the alliance will stand is currently at hot-topic for the estates.

Sitting in the shadow of the Bittermand mountains, Rivercross' terrain is remarkably hilly and swampy. Straight roads are rare, and most journeys will require crossing at least one of the country's namesake rivers.

Windwall

Once a leading force in Norastern, the dwarves of Windwall have been driven back to their home mountains. Their memories of greatness still linger, and many hope to bring the ancient kingdom back to its old glory.

Formed of several dwarven clans whose bloodlines are shared by almost all dwarves today, the Kingdom of Windwall is led by a clan-leader selected by the others. While anyone could become king, many Windwall kings have been from House Auric. At the moment, rounding out three centuries of rule, King Maderick Auric "The Gilded" leads the dwarves with an exuberant and booksmart style of ruling.

Windwall produces many finely crafted goods, as well as thousands of tons of mined ore and stone. While the kingdom may not be the military juggernaut it once was, it remains a financial and trade hub. The rare mineral cadamite is only found in the capital, Charmark, highly valued for its conductivity and minor levitation.

Most of Windwall is underground, with a mix of precisely cut corridors and rough natural caverns. On the surface, most of the land is frostbitten and ragged, with gentle hills and vales dotting the map.

Stormcrafters

Once just a collection of radically-minded gnomes, the Stormcrafters have gone on to found the city of Nevermind and build a technocracy. They hold the most advanced technology in the world, and a good deal of the most powerful magic as well.

In Nevermind, the Stormcrafter high council convenes to discuss matters like public grant funding, moral testing restrictions, and foreign policy. The council is composed of eminent artificers and researchers, but the real power rests with Belladonna. Outwardly something of a court jester, Belladonna has a network of blackmail and coercion she uses to steer the Stormcrafters as she wishes.

Aeralys & Deralia

The snow elf cities are isolated enough that their archaic ways-of-life have persisted despite the rest of Norastern modernizing. With death an ever-present force in the Frostfield, the snow elves have built their society around the worship of Kelemvor, god of the dead. Brilliant necromancers have emerged from these cities.

While there is no strict governance in snow elf society, it is famous for its dynastic struggles. Long-standing dynasties of stubbornly persistent snow elves fill their time trying to undermine one another, mostly through shows of wealth or religious offerings.

Aeralys sits at the gateway in and out of the Frostfield, and sees the most foreigners. It is also somewhat of a trading hub and has grown fat off the wealth sailing up and down the neighbouring river. Deralia is much quieter, but has a strong academic community present to study its ruins and peruse its archives.

Ceramis & Wymias

As of late, wood elves have put their skilled labour and savvy business sense to good use. Their cities are bustling with artisans and guild merchants. Sitting near to Crescent Cove, both Ceramis and Wymias are global ports. The dangers nearby kingdoms presented to the cities in years past remains a sore spot, and the wood elves are pleased to be thriving on their own.

Wood elves are led by an elder who serves as mayor, acting as an authority in disputes but otherwise leaving the cities' citizens be. The real power lies with the guilds, powerful conglomerates who trade favours. Many decisions are made only after a night of sipping wine and whispering.

Karkarov & Urvok

Though orc society is nomadic, their intense familial ties and sense of duty keep them in close-knit clans. The largest of these have found themselves pitching camp in the same regions from year to year, leading to two cities which each shift a few kilometres from week to week when minor wanderlust takes over.

At the moment, the Karkarov orcs are led by Rodrik, an ambitious but cautious chieftain, set on invading Seasplit but afraid of putting his clan in harm's way. Urvok is much less centralized, with chieftains passing from year to year as they best each other in single combat to earn the leadership role.

Orcish society produces many skilled hunters and trackers who procure most of their food. Little is unused by orcs, meaning they have little to trade and are therefore a relatively poor people. The territory they frequent is icy and bleak, sitting on the edge of the Frostfield. Orc camps are set up in bivouacs and other natural shelters.

Nuladulawink

Founded on the ideals of political representation and free enterprise, the gnomes of Nuladulawink are some of the most prosperous and profitable people in the world. The city is designed entirely to wring money out of tourists and to facilitate the obscene amounts of trade that unloads in the ports.

The city is managed as a democracy, with every city block electing a representative to the council. These councillors then decide on tariffs, defense, and other matters that the city must approach as a collective. For smaller matters, the guilds and merchants of Nuladulawink have a large degree of autonomy, allowing them to conduct business as they please.

Gidagow

The remains of the Triton Empire mostly rest in Gidagow, now a small fishing town. The locals are able to subsist and even turn a small profit thanks to their wood elf friends. When townsfolk need advice or if the town is threatened, they often turn to the elders who still have royal blood running in their veins.

Seaspeck

Home to an exclave of former refugees, many of Seaspeck fled there during the wars between Seasplit and Rivercross. Their town is still in its infancy, but the locals are determined to stay isolated from the mainland, and keep wary of outsiders. There is no formal leader.

The Eastern Seas

As the Triton Sea and Farfell Ocean are mostly unexplored, societies like those on the mainland are mostly unknown. Rather, many races gather into smaller tribal settlements for mutual defense. These often are led by grizzled veterans or wise sages chosen from the citizenry by consensus. Visitors may be treated with hostility at first, but many of these tribes are reasonable folk who can be swayed with gifts and kindness.