

VOYAGER'S GUIDE TO T'LINDHET

Deep beneath the Gnollwatch Mountains, the city of T'lindhet has persisted for millennia. It has weathered the attacks of duergar and illithid alike, flourishing in the inhospitable blackness of the Underdark.

As progenitors of Dambrath's halfbreed crinti, the drow of T'lindhet enjoyed a favored status within the nation's boundaries until 1385. In one brutal night, the crinti's human slaves—who had been polluted with the curse of lycanthropy by the god Malar and his Chosen, Velasco—rose up in coordinated attacks against their masters. The Uprising of the Fang, as the massacre has been called, led to a dramatic reordering of Dambrath's politics.

By its end, the crinti were dead, exiled, or in hiding. The Melanith Confederation, the human government that had risen from the ashes of the Uprising, took great pains not to provoke reprisal from T'lindhet. They were careful to distinguish drow from crinti as they rose to power, but the damage had been done.

The drow became ever more insular and suspicious, fearing that the Uprising was merely the first step toward an attack upon their homeland. Six powerful priestesses of Lolth transformed themselves by magic into monstrous spider hybrids, and began a lonely vigil. They lined the tunnels to T'lindhet with webs of silk and spellcraft, sealing off Dambrath's paths to the Underdark to all but a select few.

Since then, the city has continued on as a major hub of trade within the Underdark. But now, with the enchantments of the Sisters fraying, the ways to the overworld are laid bare, and T'lindhet is exposed once more.

AN ISLAND IN THE DARK

The city of T'lindhet occupies a vast plateau within the southwestern reaches of the subterranean region of Great Bhaerynden. Virtually inaccessible due sheer walls on all sides and a river that splits to encircle the city, the crescent-shaped plateau cradles an expanse of cavern floor.

Drow explorers from Lurth Dreier discovered the plateau millennia ago, finding it inaccessible by mundane means. This difficulty proved to be alluring: many drow are xenophobic and paranoid, so the idea of a city impregnable to conventional attack offered irresistible appeal to the explorers. On a second expedition, they brought a skilled wizard with them. She established a portal to the top of the plateau. They found it to be uninhabited and the ground fertile, and their makeshift stone huts were the first seeds from which the city of T'lindhet grew.

The lower cavern protected by the curve of T'lindhet's plateau proved to be a boon for the city. At first, it was merely a riverside waystation that allowed the drow to resupply their new settlement. As T'lindhet grew, so too did its trading needs. This was the origin of the Night Market. This vast, strange bazaar has evolved into a major conflux of trade for Great Bhaerynden. Drow, duergar, myconids, svirfneblin, and even the occasional avaricious overworlder flood the uneven and shifting streets of the market.

T'lindhet is progressive for a drow city, perhaps due to necessity. Its relationship with the crinti and its dependence upon outside trade have fostered a grudging acceptance of other races. Even so, non-drow are permitted upon the plateau only sparingly. Most are gnoll, human, or shield dwarf slaves. The portal to the city proper is heavily guarded and no outsider passes without scrutiny.

A TANGLED WEB OF TRADITION

T'lindhet does not have a single ruler or ruling council. Power is instead the focus of a delicate tug-of-war between authorities mundane and mystical. At the center of this web sits the priesthood of Lolth, but they are merely the final arbiters of pronouncements made by the worldly rulers of the High Houses. Serving to stabilize the city and carry out the law, governmental bodies known as cantons manage most civil services. To an outsider, this is a confusing tangle of law and tradition, but drow seem to navigate the power struggles of T'lindhet as if born to it.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF LOLTH

At the dead center of the plateau is the Shadowsilk Temple. This immense spider-shaped building is hewn from oily black obsidian. Entering the temple requires traversing a long stairway that proceeds directly into the spider's maw. Within is a twisting warren of corridors and vast halls wherein the priestesses of Lolth perform their rites to the vicious arachnid goddess.

Although they might wish otherwise, the priesthood of Lolth tolerates temples to the other gods and goddesses of the Dark Seldarine within the city. Only worship of Vhaeraun, Lolth's foremost rival, is explicitly forbidden, but shrines to Eilistraee are typically confined to the plateau's outskirts.

Commandments from the priesthood are seen as originating from Lolth herself. The temple rarely abuses this fact to directly create drow law. Instead, they frequently defer to the High Houses, the city's mundane rulers. Only if there is a disagreement between two or more of the High Houses do the priestesses of Lolth decide policy.

THE HIGH HOUSES

Politics is a vicious and deadly struggle in T'lindhet. Power is simultaneously craved and feared, for the higher one rises, the more daggers are at their back. For the High Houses, assassinations and murder are an expected part of daily life.

The High Houses have their origin in the first days of the city. When other drow began to arrive in T'lindhet, the first explorers were unable to settle upon a single voice of rule. They chose, instead, to share power with one another. A seemingly simple rule arose: so long as all of the city's ruling voices agreed with one another, their word was as law.

As one might expect, this simple rule created chaos when combined with the fractious nature of most drow. This led to the current tradition: if one or more High Houses making a declaration and it goes unchallenged by the others, that declaration becomes as law. In cases where the High Houses cannot agree or where a declaration meaningfully clashes with established law, the priesthood of Lolth hears arguments from among the High Houses and settles the matter.

Over the years, there have been as few as twelve and as many as sixteen High Houses. Bloodlines have risen to the status and fallen from it in the course of days, and some houses have held their place for decades, but rarely longer.

Typically, membership is decided by current representatives of the High Houses. Merchants that have had incredible successes, generals responsible for great victories, or wizards delving into revolutionary new magics all might attract the attention of the extant houses. And if no vacancies exist, they can always be made.

There are currently twelve High Houses, some of which are detailed here:

HOUSE MORVINAS

Tethron Morvinas is a handsome young man with sun-golden hair. His father built House Morvinas into a major power by securing vital trade routes in the Shaar, bringing exotic dyes into T'lindhet. Tethron was said to be greatly enamored of a daughter of House A'avaleith, a house that specialized in textiles. He proposed a marriage and alliance between the two houses, but was rejected.

HOUSE DENEGBROS

House Denebros is one of the oldest of the current High Houses. Its leader, Amaj Denebros, rose to prominence in the Canton of Defense and was responsible for a major victory against a duergar army in the years after the Spellplague. She is seen as one of the fairer-minded members of the Twelve.

HOUSE EFERIS

Eferis textiles and thread are found across the Underdark and occasionally make their way into the overworld. They are one of the wealthiest families in the city, and Andrastia Eferis, the house head, is especially ostentatious in her tastes.

HOUSE VORAVIAL

Lanya Voravial inherited her position among the Twelve from her mother, but lacks the familial gift for magic. Voravial's star among the High Houses appears to be waning, and she has firmly allied herself with House Eferis in order to retain the reins of power.

THE CANTONS

Governmental agencies in T'lindhet are referred to as cantons. The cantons do not make the law, but are charged with its execution. Their power comes from the freedom to decide how to carry out that duty. Service in one of the cantons is a prestigious career and is seen as selfless and civic-minded. Cantons range in focus and size from the great and broad to the small and narrow. Several examples include:

CANTON OF DEFENSE

Responsible for maintaining the physical defenses of the city. Although T'lindhet is largely seen as impregnable, the existence of the Night Market adds a layer of complication to the Canton's duties.

CANTON OF ORDER

Although crime is a rarity on the upper plateau, the Canton of Order maintains jails and the justice system in the city proper. Their jurisdiction traditionally does not extend to the market below.

CANTON OF ARCANA

The Canton of Arcana is charged with the oversight of all magic used within the city. This canton's members power the stable portal between the Night Market and T'lindhet proper, and also handle the magical defenses of the city. They require all magic users to register with them.

CANTON OF TRADE

Traders must pay taxes to and register with the Canton of Trade. They have their hand in all goods entering and exiting the city, along with most of the coin that legitimately changes hands within its boundaries.