

## ∞ Islands of the Known Lands ∞

# Nivera



One of the many islands that dot the seas between the Known Lands and the distant Misari Expanse is a verdant green wonderland of towering, snow-capped peaks and thick, teeming jungles, all virtually exploding with life. What's more, this island has a large number of life forms that are extremely rare or virtually unknown anywhere else, and the reason why this ecosystem is so unique is one of many questions that the Ancient & Intrepid Cartographer's Society would desperately love to see answered, but like so much of the world in the modern age, the mystery persists. The island is labeled on most maps as Nivera, after the first explorer to walk its shores, Argus Nivera of Aramyst, and is well known for its somewhat primeval nature.

The waters surrounding Nivera are relatively placid compared to many of the other islands in the region, most of which are rife with jagged reefs that can send a ship to the bottom of the sea in mere moments. This relative safety has encouraged approach by vessels in the process of a lengthy sea voyage, which has in turn given rise to the pseudo-permanent pirate community on the island's south eastern shore. Particularly large and well-armed vessels have been known to approach the island from the west and use landing parties to lure out some of the jungle's larger specimens, which can then be felled with ship-board cannons and used to completely restock the ship's supplies with little cost other than ammunition and the time lost in harvesting the food and water.

Arcanists in the employ of the Cartographer's Society who have visited Nivera have theorized that the island possesses a strong natural connection to the realms of the fey, as was once the case on the mainland in the region now occupied by the High

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Steppes. It is this link, they propose, that has resulted in the nigh-unique offshoot of the faerkin race that occupies the island as well as the highly unusual species of creatures that make their home on the island. Many of these massive creatures have unique names assigned by various pirate crews, but on the whole they are often referred to by one of two ancient Vanoran terms that predate the Great War: *dai-nosoru*, which means “lizard kings,” or *kai-juru*, which means “beast lords.”

## FEATURES OF THE ISLAND

✧ **THE STOMPING JUNGLE** – Three quarters of the island is dominated by a lush jungle and related terrain that towers high above the ground, in some places blotting out the sun with the dense canopy created where the trees have grown together. It is believed that this region was first given its rather sardonic name by a member of the Nivera Expedition some centuries ago, and as a clear comparison to the Crawling Jungle on the mainland. Whereas the Crawling Jungle is dominated by insect life of all shapes and sizes, some gigantic, the so-called Stomping Jungle is ruled over by massive reptiles that come in a variety of sizes but which tend toward the enormous. Quadrupeds, bipeds, herbivores, carnivores, land-bound, avian, aquatic... the variety is endless but they have a few traits in common: they tend to be extremely large and relatively unintelligent. This region of the island is bereft of sapient life because of the sheer danger of living near such creatures, and a single predator can easily wipe out an entire expedition in a very short amount of time.

✧ **THE TOWERS** – Although not a proper mountain range and far from impassible, the easternmost quarter of Nivera is divided from the rest by a series of sharp, tall peaks that are tall enough to be shrouded in snow and mist despite the tropical climate. The mountains are an effective barrier against the vast majority of the island’s giant saurian life-forms, which keeps the settlement on the eastern portion relatively safe from the creatures. Smaller creatures can pass from one portion of the island to the other, but it is difficult to cross the mountains under even ideal circumstances, and requires some degree of skill in mountaineering or at least an athletic aptitude for climbing in order to navigate a path. Further complicating travel is the fact that a small mixed tribe of extremely hostile goblinoids calls the mountains home and ruthlessly defends their territory from anyone they consider an interloper. This group has on occasion led raids into the Great Forest as a means of striking back against “invasion” by travelers from the village there.

✧ **THE GREAT FOREST** – The eastern portion of the island is dominated largely by a forest that covers the northern half of the region. Unlike other forests found on the mainland, however, the trees of this forest are spectacularly massive, growing to be hundreds of feet tall and whose trunks are dozens of feet in diameter when fully grown.

✧ **TREETOP VILLAGE** – This settlement is highly distinctive in that it was created, has grown, and remains entirely constructed amid the treetops of the massive everwood trees that grow within the Great Forest. Located hundreds of feet above the ground, Treetop Village is completely secured and safe from even the largest saurian predators of the Stomping Jungle, who have occasionally found their way into the forest on one or more occasions over the centuries. The situation is not as dangerous as it might appear for the majority of its denizens, however; the bulk of the village’s citizens are a particular bloodline of faerkin who have very strong ties to the pixie subrace of the fey, and as a result have small but powerful wings that allow them to flutter from place to place with very little risk of falling. Although members of this particular bloodline are not unheard of on the mainland, they are extremely scarce, and no one has as yet managed to identify exactly why so many dwell on this island in such numbers.

✧ **THE PIRATE LOWLANDS** – The southern coast of the eastern portion of the island is a lowland that has little to offer that cannot be found in greater abundance within the Great Forest to the north, and for that reason the denizens of the forest rarely travel to the relatively empty lowlands. However, this is not to say that the lowlands are not without

their attractions: ample fresh water, a variety of fruit-bearing trees and an abundance of small game make it a popular location for ships that have no wish to make port at a settlement to drop anchor. In other words, it is a haven for pirate vessels looking to replenish supplies and make landfall for a short time. There roughly a dozen individuals who have established permanent residences in the area in order to make a living from the pirates who visit periodically, and a few empty buildings from others who attempted the same but failed to find it to their liking. The region is not entirely without danger, however, as there is a species of extremely large and particularly vicious crocodile that nest along the coastline and which have no compunctions about hunting and eating pirates despite the danger inherent in doing so. Most visitors to the island are wise enough to be cautious but sometimes drink gets the better of them and it is not uncommon for several people to disappear each season, their remains never recovered.

## DENIZENS OF THE ISLAND

There are a number of individuals who make their home on Nivera, although obviously the majority are centered in Treetop Village and a smaller number in the pirate lowlands. The others are an assortment of survivalists and refugees who have ended up on the island mostly by fate and for whatever reason have chosen to remain there rather than seek to return from whence they came.

### Tirsa Wingstorm

[N FEMALE FAERKIN SORCERER 11]

For all that the denizens of Treetop Village appear to be primitives in the eyes of those from the mainland, they are not unintelligent, and Tirsa Wingstorm roundly rejects the idea that she is a “chieftain,” preferring instead to be called mayor (a term learned from mainland visitors) or “headwoman” (an archaic term once used in ancient Vanora). Regardless, however, Tirsa is unquestionably the leader of the settlement and is greatly respected by all who live there, and most others on the island as well. Even the pirates to the south acknowledge that she is not someone to be messed with, since her command of magic is significant and her sense of humor toward those she regards as having wronged her people can be particularly cruel. Rumors persist that she has sunk no less than four vessels due to the actions of their crews toward her people, and whether or not this is true, it is enough to ensure that most pirates don’t think bothering her village is worth the risk.

Toward her people, Tirsa is a gregarious and charitable person who is beloved by virtually everyone. She has a gift for seeing strength in others and encouraging it, and as a result she is aided in her duties by highly skilled subordinates to whom she delegates when appropriate. Despite the closeness of the various bloodlines among the faerkin of Treetop, Tirsa does not discriminate against those of other races, and welcomes any who wish to make the village their home. Her outlook is truly a tribal one, wherein those she accepts into her group are considered as family.

### Juri, “the Seahorse”

[NG MALE HUMAN UNCHAINED MONK 8]

An enigmatic figure who makes his home within the Stomping Jungle, no one who is aware of his presence on the island is sure how Juri arrived there or where he came from. A lithe but powerful human male, Juri seems perfectly content to eke out a solitary existence in the jungle, surviving by his wits and avoiding the massive predators that dominate the region. Juri’s name comes from his unique weapon, a



quarterstaff that has affixed to one end a spine from one of the massive and deadly thrako seahorses that dwell within the depths of the southern seas. How he came to possess such a weapon is unknown, as is the source of the virulent seahorse venom he coats it with when hunting. Despite his rather ominous reputation and his somewhat savage appearance, Juri is a pleasant enough individual to encounter when in the jungle, if a bit non-talkative. He is obviously of Vanoran descent, although he does have a number of Misari tattoos on his upper arms and shoulders as well. He has, on many occasions, aided shipwrecked castaways and aided them in finding Treetop Village, where they are safe from the predators of the Stomping Jungle (and where they will not interfere with his hunting or his solitary lifestyle). Juri is well known in Treetop Village and welcome there on the rare occasions when he appears to trade furs or excess meat.

## EXPANDED ADVENTURES

Nivera represents a number of different, more or less self-contained environments, each with its own opportunities for long-term adventures and subject to change at the hands of adventurers depending upon their actions.

### The Stomping Jungle

The jungle is the largest portion of the island, and the one least likely to be affected long-term by any actions on the part of visiting adventurers; its denizens are few in number and solitary by nature, whereas the wildlife cannot easily be dominated or circumvented due to its size and ruthless nature. It is not impossible that a stronghold could be established in the region, however, as the jungle canopy is high enough above the ground that it is out of reach of virtually all predators. Such an endeavor could prove profitable for enterprising individuals, as the notion of hunting such massive beasts for the wealth of resources they provide would appeal to many in the Known Lands, and that is not even to delve into the idea of the rich natural resources that exist virtually untapped within the jungle itself.

If desired, it is possible that there are indeed sapient people dwelling within the Stomping Jungle, in the form of a more primal, primitive sub-race of rapacians that have adopted absolute stealth and perhaps subterranean living in order to survive encounters with the massive saurian creatures with whom they share their home. These rapacians are utterly unknown to the other denizens of the island, whose occasional sightings of them are written off as some other species of reptilian that dwells on the island (of which there are many, so the confusion is understandable). For their part, the primitive tribe of proto-rapacians have a very xenophobic outlook and, while not openly hostile towards other races, are not exactly warm and welcoming either. Discovering their existence is something that they will take as an indirect threat to their ongoing way of life and will respond to very poorly, potentially trying to permanently silence anyone, especially outsiders, who discover their subterranean home or even their mere existence.

As noted previously, it is possible that a sort of cottage industry could spring up on Nivera centered around hunting the massive reptiles in the jungle for food to resupply sea-going vessels. There are very few well-supplied ports anywhere within a week or more of the island, and ships that have experienced any kind of spoilage, or even those who merely planned poorly, might look upon the island as a means of inexpensively acquiring ample meat and fresh water for the remainder of their journey. Some particularly greedy individuals might even consider taking the meat to other ports to sell, although this is a difficult proposition at best. The likelihood of permanent structures being erected in this region of the island is highly unlikely for the same reason that the hunting itself is so dangerous: even the most benevolent among the creatures being hunted is of such size that they present an incredible danger to anyone

trying to capture, attack, or even approach them, but this is not necessarily enough of a deterrent to keep dedicated or desperate sailors away.

### The Towers

Far and away the most sparsely populated and inhospitable region of Nivera, the Towers are surprisingly steep and jagged mountains that make passage difficult for the large reptiles that dwell on the western portion of the island. Smaller creatures, particularly intelligent ones, have a much simpler time traversing the area but still require a steady hand, a keen eye, and a sharp wit to avoid disaster when doing so. The most populous species found in this region include a particularly large and shaggy type of mountain goat and a similarly sized reptile species that competes with the goats for the sparse vegetation in the area.

The reason for the particularly dangerous aspect of the Towers is that they are relatively young by mountainous standards and were still volcanically active until a century or so ago. This relatively recent upheaval, combined with the island's inherent dangers and the inaccessible location, mean that they have never been truly assessed for what resources it possesses. If anyone were to go to the trouble of performing such a survey, the discovery would be incredible indeed: the Towers possess a vein of manite richer by far than any ever found on the mainland. Anyone who uncovers this fact will possess knowledge that could make them an incredibly wealthy individual, but as always is the case with things of such value, would also place their life at risk. Many would be willing to kill such a person to claim the knowledge for their own or to prevent others from discovering the location in question. Unfortunately, passing the information to others is more or less the only way to truly profit from the discovery, as extracting the manite in any significant quantity is well beyond the scope of the average adventurer's skill and talent. Calling in a nation or organization with sufficient resources to mine the mineral, however, will result in the wholesale slaughter of local wildlife, deforestation of the jungle, and the likely extinction of most if not all of the hidden rapacian tribe discussed above (assuming they are part of the campaign), with the few remaining survivors left as bitter and ruthless saboteurs.

Worthy of note is that there is a controversial and often-dismissed theory that a strong tie exists between the existence of manite and the long-ago ties between the mortal realm and the realms of the fey. The reasoning for this suggested tie is ill-defined and often inconsistent not only among different proponents but occasionally by individual advocates as well. While there is virtually nothing to substantiate the theory present at Nivera, the twin occurrences of a strong fey presence and a significant quantity of manite would almost certainly spark a new and vigorous discussion of this theory all throughout the Known Lands and its adjacent island territories, potentially diverting research and development away from more trusted, useful theories.

### Treetop Village

The only true settlement on Nivera, Treetop Village is unlike any other village known to the citizens of Aden. It was built and has expanded amid the treetops of the vast forest on the island's northeastern area, hence its name. Visitors to the village are initially alarmed by the lack of sturdy railings and safety measures in place to prevent what would likely be a fatal fall. What rails do exist are roughly knee-high or, at best, slightly below waist level for most average sized beings. The fact that the vast majority of the village is populated by faerkin means these are sufficient, and most are not necessary at all since the lion's share of faerkin on Nivera are capable of flight on their pixie wings. Anyone who takes a tumble merely flits back up with a laugh and a smile, and the matter is forgotten. If someone without wings falls, the result is far less frivolous. Even the most hardened, battle-scarred warrior ensconced in heavy armor cannot survive a fall from such height.

Treetop Village is highly unusual in more ways than its unique location. The villagers there have at least semi-regular contact with the outside world through visiting ships, and are aware of the level of tech-



nology that exists elsewhere, particularly in the Known Lands. Despite this, they have no interest in adopting such ways themselves. They are not anti-technology, but they have little use for it and even less interest in making it part of their daily lives. While it is never discussed openly, the people of Treetop have a deep, abiding reverence for the ways of the fey. It is not a religion per se, but more of a spiritual philosophy that is so common among the faerkin that the handful of other residents have sort of absorbed it simply by its overwhelming prevalence. Despite that faerkin have no allergy to metals, the bloodlines in this village largely eschew its use except when unavoidable; it is an unspoken way they honor their otherworldly ancestors.

Due to the unique beliefs of its faerkin people, Treetop Village has become a renowned center for craftsmanship, with the tiny residents turning their considerable dexterity to woodworking and other arts utilizing primitive materials. A small number are familiar with and competent in metal-working, but they prefer to trade with the few denizens of the lowlands to fulfill the needs they have in that regard rather than do it themselves. Again, it is a show of respect more than anything else, and one that they have maintained for many years.

It is not uncommon for the average citizen in the Known Lands to have some small affinity for the arcane arts, with folk magic and lower level spells being known to a great many people who have not studied them more than casually. In Treetop, this tendency is a bit more pronounced, and the average villager is more skilled than would be expected for people choosing to live a relatively primitive lifestyle. The average villager in Treetop would be roughly the equivalent as a student at a magical academy in the Known Lands perhaps halfway through their first year of studies. Unfortunately there are few options for the villagers to pursue the craft any further, unless they are accepted as an apprentice by one of Treetop's few genuine spellcasters, none of whom are traditionally trained, but rather are primitive and powerful individuals with a strong, natural connection to the other realms.

## The Pirate Lowlands

The southeastern portion of Nivera is the only part of the island that has anything resembling modern society from the perspective of citizens from the Known Lands. It is also the portion of the island best suited for seagoing vessels to make a landing as well as the most receptive to outsiders, as the few permanent denizens who make that region home are well accustomed to ships stopping by with little to no notice.

The shoreline along the southeastern coast is a natural harbor that can allow even the largest galleons and other typical ships to moor within perhaps a hundred feet or so of the land, and there are even a handful of crudely constructed piers extending out that far that are available on a first come, first served basis. In theory up to half a dozen ships could easily moor at once in the small harbor, but there have never been more than three and rarely ever more than one or two at a time, with long periods where none visit the island at all. The region's handful of full-time denizens are accustomed to the feast-or-famine existence and have ties to Treetop Village as well as a talent for rationing resources they acquire during the frenzy of spending and bartering that accompanies a ship's arrival in port.

Most of the goods that are available for visitors to purchase in the lowlands are either manufactured by those who live there or, in the cases of a few items, are traded for from the nearby faerkin village. In addition to accepting coin for goods, the merchants of the lowlands also barter for trade goods and raw materials, which they can either make use of themselves, trade to the faerkin for a profit, or sell to other ships interested in taking on cargo while in port.

By far the largest, best-constructed, and profitable enterprise on Nivera is also the oldest, a massive and sturdy edifice called the Courthouse. A combination inn, tavern, and brothel, the establishment was created and is overseen by a half-elf who calls himself the Judge. The Judge has been living on the island for more than a decade, well longer than anyone else, and employs a half-dozen women of varying ages, race, and appearance to work in many different capacities within the business. All are there voluntarily and are treated well as well as being well-compensated for their services. The Judge and his staff make up more than half the island's native population, and the Judge himself is a skilled brewmaster responsible for the vast majority of the spirits served in his establishment. Little is known about the Judge's background, but rumors persist that he is a former alchemist in service to the throne of Columbey, or that he is simply a native of Steel Waters and learned his trade there. The Judge himself has repeated both of these stories and many others, seemingly at random.

Other than the Courthouse, the only other true building in the lowlands is the smithy, operated by a relatively young Jurak woman named Zakalia. Originally from the Rhanate, Zakalia was a passenger on a vessel that stopped off on Nivera some years ago and, for reasons not even she truly understands, decided to stay. She has constructed a sturdy building that serves as both her forge and her home, and she is the only metalworker on the entire island, with the faerkin in Treetop Village working almost entirely in wood and stone for their daily needs. Zakalia supplies both the Courthouse and Treetop with all the materials they require worked in metal, and has a brisk trade in replacement parts for ships and crewmen who visit the island. She is particularly skilled in rapidly forging custom replacement parts for firearms, even though she herself is not a gunsmith. She has even on occasion replaced entire cannons for the ships that moor at the island, although this is a process that takes weeks if not months, and usually has to be ordered in advance in order to be ready in a timely manner.

Beyond these two major structures, there are a handful of other ramshackle buildings that have been built by temporary residents over the past few years. On average, four to six others make their home on the island at any given time. At present, the other residents include a trio of human brothers who are skilled at crafting everyday goods from wood and other primitive materials, and who are frequently employed as carpenters to make minor repairs to ships in the harbor. There is also a young couple who allegedly operated a restaurant in Balaquim before ending up on the island after pirates attacked the sailing ship on which they were passengers. They are both talented cooks and make a brisk trade whenever a ship is in harbor. They can only prepare enough food for a small number of diners, however, so the Judge does not consider them true competition for his tavern and thus lets them do as they wish, even contracting with them for certain functions when he needs to increase the quality of his wares.

The most immediate manner in which adventurers might have long-term, permanent impact on this region of Nivera would be altering the extent of holdings that exist in the lowlands. Although the island is meager in the way of ports, but if there were larger and more extensive holdings there, its location could very well attract a significantly larger degree of traffic. Although it would take many years of development, it is possible that Nivera could host a true settlement and port. The most significant opposition in this regard would be from the Judge, who prefers the settlement remain small and thoroughly under his control. The Judge is actually a fugitive from a war between crime cartels in Synthica, and he has many powerful enemies that would eagerly see him dead no matter where he was; the island would not be a safe refuge, not for a cartel with a reputation for ensuring that no one survives a war against their interests.



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