

Duchy of Cambria

The Duchy of Cambria is the centre of Haylem, bordered by the vast Lake Persephont to the south, the Duchies of Aieland and Ellisel to the north, and Taleria and the Barbarian Concessions to the southwest. Thriving and populous, it is a Duchy of bustling cities and busy market towns, of prosperous farms and well-kept roads. If all roads in the Kingdom lead to Cambria, all roads in Cambria lead eventually to Haylem City itself, the Kingdom's capital and largest centre of population.

While humans make up the majority of the population, several of the largest Shires of the Hobblings are found here, as is the traditional homeland of the Dwarves, the mighty city of Khuzud Dul. The Duchy is comprised of two Counties: County Somershire, which curves around the western shore of Lake Persephont and shares borders with the Barbarian Lands and Taleria, and County Kilmoun, which covers the eastern reaches of the Duchy with Aieland bordering it to the north, and the Serpentine River and Asambroda forest to the east.

Cambria produces a wide variety of crops on its farms and homesteads, and the fishing on Lake Persephont is the livelihood of many. Much of Haylem's military is based in Cambria, and producing weapons, armour, mounts and supplies for their support is an industry of its own. Cattle and sheep graze the fields and meadows, while trade goods from throughout Haylem and beyond flow across the Duchy borders every day.

Haylem City – Capital of Haylem

Haylem's capital is officially its own jurisdictional area, situated between the borders of Somershire and Kilmoun on the shore of Lake Persephont. The largest city in the kingdom, Haylem has been a power in the area since the era of the City States – a stout fortress and military bastion that is now the administrative hub of the entire kingdom. The City also serves as the Capital of Cambria. Although their dynasty no longer rules the Kingdom that bears their name, the legacy of the Von Haylem's power and military acumen is in evidence throughout the city.

Thick walls of stone protect the city from siege, and within the city a secondary set of walls provides a fallback near the Royal Castle should the outskirts of the city ever fall to invaders. As a port, it is doubly difficult to lay siege to Haylem City, as it would require a substantial blockade of Lake Persephont as well to prevent supplies from reaching the docks. In living memory this was only accomplished during the Second Necromancer war, when undead forces surrounded the city by water and land, until the siege was broken by the arrival of the Barbarian Clans.

There is a substantial military presence in the capital, with barracks and parade fields for a large portion of the Kingdom's standing army, and special wharfs and shipyards for naval military vessels. Several of the Chivalric orders maintain their headquarters in the city, in close proximity to the royal castle, and Knights and their retinues are regular sights on the city streets.

For all this, the life of the common folk in Haylem City is relatively peaceable, and it is rare to see someone openly bearing arms who is not in the uniform of a soldier or guard. Aside from the usual urban risks of cutpurses and thieves, Haylem City is known as a law-abiding sort of place, as befits the Kingdom capital. Someone with knowledge of the underworld would likely be able to find it in Haylem City, but that element does seem to comport themselves discreetly.

Strategically situated on the high ground of the city, with views over the lake and the cobbled streets, the royal castle is built from the same golden stone as the city's walls. Constructed during the Von Haylem's time, and improved upon constantly since Unification, the castle acts as both a centre of courtly life and a fortress. It is said you can never get lost in Haylem City, because you can always look up and find the castle. Multiple towers soar up into the sky, grand halls welcome official guests, and deep beneath the ground the royal treasury is kept safe and secure.

The Celestial and Earthen Towers also have impressive presences in the city, with large Guild Halls as well members filling permanent appointments to the Court at the Castle itself. The Celestial Towers in particular has expanded their holdings in the city over the last ten years, taking over additional buildings to house Sages and researchers. Smaller Guildhouses serve different parts of the city, making it one of the few places in Haylem large enough to have what amounts to neighbourhood Guilds.

As the centre of the kingdom's administration, Haylem City also has extensive halls of records and a central library of scrolls, books, and documents pertaining to the Kingdom's history. While the library does not have the epic scope of Aieland's Great Library, its focus on Kingdom law and jurisdictional history makes it an invaluable resource for scribes researching claims to title, property disputes, and issues of diplomacy and trade.

Commerce thrives in Haylem City. Ships offload goods constantly at the docks, where tariff officers and merchants alike wait to haggle and inspect their cargo. Huge warehouses store a myriad of different goods, while closer to the castle the great Kingdom Granaries stockpile foodstuffs in case of shortages in the winter. There are several different markets in Haylem City, from the rough and ready Dockside Market to the trinkets, treasures and wonders to be found at the stalls in Persephont Plaza. There are enough stores and shops that many have their own City Guilds – the Blacksmiths, the Farriers, the Tailors and the Candle makers, to name only a few.

Entertainment, from street side puppet shows to elaborate theatrical performances, is very popular in the city. The very poor enjoy musicians performing in the marketplaces and the “copper afternoons” at some of the less reputable theatres, while the wealthier gain entry to dramatic historical epics or salons with famous musicians. The whole city comes out to celebrate significant moments for the Kingdom, with fireworks over the bay that can be seen from the lowliest street to the towers of the royal castle itself.

County Somershire

County Somershire is the crossroads of the Kingdom – the only region it *doesn't* share a border with is Aieland. Trade roads and caravan routes wind down from Kyrinen through the Barbarian Lands, from Tiefanu in Ellisel, and up from the southern reaches of Taleria. The villages of Somershire tend to boast large inns and multiple taverns due to the constant flow of travelers, and Listani guides are often employed to find the very best route to bring a merchant's caravan in that few days faster than their competitors.

In years past, Somershire was in a state of constant military readiness due to the uneasy relationship with the Barbarians to the west. The official recognition of the Clans into the Kingdom has changed this dynamic dramatically, and these days the troops of Somershire are more likely to be supporting Talerian troops to the south along the Wall in case of trouble from the Black Wastes.

Somershire has few wild places, most of the old forests now felled for lumber or grazing, or cultivated as farmland. Farmers grow grains and cotton, graze cattle and raise poultry, often selling directly to the Kingdom's storehouses in Haylem City. Communities in Somershire are strongly interconnected with both each other and the County as a whole, and the administration runs smoothly from its seat just north of Culloden.

Culloden – Capital of County Somershire

Culloden is a large market town and the capital of County Somershire, with a mixed population of Humans, Hobblings, and other races. Originally a military fort, it is now a busy trading centre for goods heading east towards Haylem City from elsewhere in the County and the Kingdom. Burned to the ground during the Second Necromancer War, it rose quickly from the ashes, but the overall effect, it must be admitted, is ... haphazard. The town was rebuilt in haste, and most of the buildings are timbered, whitewashed, and functional, but nothing more.

The city has, in fact, been rebuilt more than once. The nearby military citadel of Roncesvalles and the town itself have been destroyed and sacked in every major conflict in local memory. Nearly always the site of fierce fighting due to its strategic location, an attack on Roncesvalles has become a symbolic act for an invading army, while the quick rebuilding of Culloden is equally vital for Kingdom morale and defense and always the first action in peacetime with the citadel always being the first place where stone is laid.

The military fort in the centre of the town remains active, stationed with members of the Chivalry and their troops. There is a magistrate's hall and a clerk's office in Culloden itself; otherwise the Count of Culloden governs Somershire from his estates to the north of the town. This distance, combined with the permanent stationing of soldiers, gives Culloden a certain rough and ready atmosphere. Tavern brawls are not uncommon, and the City Watch spends a lot of time rounding up drunken miscreants.

In times of war, however, Culloden reveals a spine of steel, mobilizing quickly, manning the timbered walls and closing the gates against whatever is marching against the Kingdom. Taking Culloden is a strong foothold for any invasion of Cambria, so holding Culloden is equally vital when the Kingdom is under threat. Armorers, fletchers and weaponsmiths are ever in high demand, and these occupations are highly respected in Culloden.

Many in Culloden who are not soldiers make their living by fishing, heading out into Lake Persephont each morning and coming back to the town's wharfs each night. The fish market is busy all day long, and its pungent aroma wafts through much of the town. Culloden has a good port, and a strong tradition of ship and boat building. It sees a good deal of trade from Lake Persephont, although less than it did in the days before Ontarius fell.

On the other side of the city, by the north gate, wagons and trading caravans come down from Kyrinen gain entry to the North Market, where primary goods like wheat, timber and cloth are bought and sold. The decrease in shipping trade has been mitigated by the increase in goods flowing south out of the "breadbasket" of Kyrinen, and the North Market has overflowed the city walls in recent years, with new warehouses, inns, and wagon yards spreading outwards from the trade road.

Facing the south road is a quarter of the city that has become a haven for mercenary companies. From here they hire themselves out to merchants travelling in every direction, to nobles in need of bolstering their defenses, or to anyone else with gold. Most of the largest mercenary companies maintain their headquarters in Culloden, administering their various contracts and protecting their treasuries and stockpiles of equipment in impressive timbered buildings built along the south wall. In an unspoken agreement with the local soldiers, they are left to their business in exchange for rallying to the defense of the city when it is under attack.

There is also a small amount of trade with the Barbarian Clans to the west, although this is still an uneasy relationship on both sides. For many years the primary duty of the fort of Culloden was to protect Cambria from Barbarian raids, and the transition to peace remains as new as the unaged timbers that Culloden is built from. The southern section of Culloden is a haven for mercenary groups looking for work and as such is often deemed a little unsafe for those not used to such company.

Willowshire

Willowshire might just be the friendliest place in Haylem. This town, in the heart of one of the largest Hobling Shires in the Kingdom, is not a region of profound political or strategic importance, but it is known far and wide for its wonderful food, good people, and sense of community. The majority of its population is Hobling, but all the races are welcome, and there is a large number of Dwarves, Humans, and Scavengers living there as well. Compania of Listani pass through often, sharing tales and news, and visitors from the northern Duchies of Ellisel and Aieland are not uncommon either.

Nestled within the green hills of Willowshire, the town that shares the Shire's name is a place of cobblestone streets, carefully tended gardens, and thatched cottages. There are inns and taverns aplenty, numerous bakeries and cakeries and sweetshops, breweries and alehouses, and specialty shops selling fine jams, chutneys and other delicacies. The town is full of cobbled squares with fresh public well water, trees to give shade, and fountains for children to play in and old timers to sit near.

In the centre of Willowshire is the Village Green, a large public park built around a centuries-old oak tree. Whenever the local nobility needs to hold a public meeting, it is held here rather than at the County seat (they put up awnings and tents if it's raining). Once a year, it is the site of Willowshire's largest event – the Willowshire Harvest Fair – a humbly-named celebration that in fact brings hundreds of food-loving visitors from all over Haylem. The Harvest Fair is the source of intense local competition, with the ribbons for Best Pie, Best Cake, and Best New Ale being particularly sought after. It is a full two weeks of delicious food, excellent ale, and local music and dancing.

Willowshire prides itself on its community values, with committees of local citizens ensuring their poorest inhabitants have food and shelter, the sick are taken care of, and the streets stay beautiful. While detractors have been known to call the town a place full of nosy parkers, the good-hearted intentions of Willowshire folk are undeniable, and the reason that many newcomers choose to settle there. It is also the reason that the town has a strong community of Scavengers, drawn to a place where they are kindly accepted and included in daily life. In fact, it was a Sheep Scavenger who won the Best Pie Blue Ribbon two years ago, in a Harvest Fair upset still being talked about.

Crafting, brewing and farming are the mainstays of Willowshire life. Willowshire cheese and Willowshire ale are exported throughout the Kingdom, as is the famous Village Green Honey. The local Earth Guild is well known for its potion-making, although all attempts to entice the Guildmaster to come and teach at the Earthen Tower in Aieland is met with stubborn resistance. Most folk who live in Willowshire have no intention of moving anywhere else, thank you very much.

County Kilmoun

County Kilmoun forms the north and east of Cambria, sharing a northern border with the Duchy of Aieland. Less populous than Somershire, it is a region of moorland, forest and mountains, with excellent land for grazing. Its mountains and hills are the traditional homeland of the dwarven people, and despite centuries of activity still home to many workable mines for precious metals, tin and iron. East of Blacas it grows even more remote, a sparsely populated land of mist and hills, home to highly superstitious communities and strange folktales.

This isolation gives the area a certain vulnerability, and in the mountains and hills packs of marauding races like orcs and goblins are a constant threat to the villages, often sweeping down in raiding parties on remote farmsteads and settlements. The Dwarves of Kilmoun have waged battles over the centuries with hobgoblins who also seek to mine the area's riches, and the conflicts flare up every now and again.

Much of the land in Kilmoun is in the hands of wealthy Cambrian nobles, who reap the rewards of the mines and grazing rights while often maintaining their households in Haylem City. It has been a source of some troubles over the years, from tenant farmers refusing to pay taxes, to banditry, to tales of poor conditions in certain mines. This climate of unrest is rumoured to have been one of the reasons rebel forces were able to sweep down out of Aieland and across Kilmoun to threaten Haylem City, and since then the Crown has been taking steps to ensure Kilmoun is better governed and its nobility more accountable to their people.

Blacas – Capital of County Kilmoun

The city of Blacas is surrounded by grey walls of weathered stone, battered by years of wind coming down off the surrounding hills and mountains. Built with the aid of Dwarven stonemiths, Blacas is a sturdy bulwark against the elements, slightly bleak in aspect but protected and safe behind its walls. A City Council of wealthy merchants and Guild representatives advises the Magistrate, and commerce is the driving force of any decisions the city of Blacas tends to make.

In the past, the nobility of Blacas were mostly usually found in Haylem City, the lure of the King's Court being too strong to resist. Since the civil unrest of a few years ago, however, the County Court is now firmly established at Blacas and much more involved in local affairs. Gone are the days when the Seneschal and Magistrate ran the city and the County Estate home to only a housekeeper and a few gardeners. It has actually been slightly disruptive to the smooth ordering of the city, as the Count is proving far less willing to listen to the wishes of the City Council than the Magistrate and Seneschal before him.

The mine owners of Kilmoun, often nobility or Dwarven Clans, employ private security to bring gold and precious jewels safely to the city. Several mercenary groups make the entirety of their living in this task, hiring out of Blacas on long-term contracts. It is rumoured a good measure of their success is their close acquaintance with the bandits of the region, and the gold that changes hands to ensure the bandits focus their attention elsewhere. In Blacas, merchants and jewelers vie for the best of the local goods, and it is often said that deals made in Blacas determine the value of gold throughout the Kingdom.

Aside from mining, the other main economic activity in Blacas is the annual Wool Fair. Farmers and shepherds travel in from the moors and hills of the County for the annual shearing and selling of wool, and merchants from all over Haylem arrive to buy Kilmoun wool. The herds are penned in huge enclosures outside of the city built expressly for the Wool Fair. It is the busiest time of the year in Blacas, and the inns and taverns are full to bursting with visitors.

Cultural life in Blacas is straightforward; people enjoy good ale and a good tale, traditional music and lively dancing. Storytelling is highly prized, especially the tales of ghosts and fae and spirits from the hills. Dwarves who live in Blacas tend to be well integrated with the humans and other folk, but visitors from the hills and Khuzud Dul often keep more to themselves. Strangers in general tend to be held in low esteem in the area, and when first met are treated with suspicion.

Khuzud Dul

Khuzud Dul, ancient mountain fastness of the Dwarves, is one of the wonders of Haylem. If the cities of the elves evoke the beauties of the forest and the open skies, the city of the Dwarves sings the glories of stones and gems and the deep places of the earth. It is the duty of each Dwarven smith of Khuzud Dul, on the completion of their apprenticeship, to devote their Master Work to the glory of the city, and after many centuries, the city is rich with sculpted beauty.

The name Khuzud Dul is both the city and the mountain itself – the Dwarves have delved deeply, and their city, mines, and ancient halls cover miles of territory beneath the mountain's peak. Nearly all of the

great Dwarven clans hail from Khuzud Dul, and most Dwarves will visit it at least once in their lifespan, no matter how far afield they may have been born. Khuzud Dul is also the home of the Dwarven Thane himself, the leader of the Dwarven people (and recognized as a Viscount in the Kingdom system as well, much in the way that Prince Remy of the High Elves holds a Viscount's title under Haylem feudal law).

The great stone gates of the city meet the visitor at the base of the mountain. Opened only to let visitors in and out, they are guarded always by members of the renowned Mountain Guard, and require intricate mechanisms of Dwarven engineering to open and close. A wide road slopes upward into the city, while statues of great Thanes and heroes stand eternal vigil on either side. Khuzud Dul is a city of stone and marble, with little wood used in its construction. The city is lit by phosphorescent alchemical torches and the light of forge fires, glowing in a perpetual flickering twilight.

The Hall of the Thane is one of Khuzud Dul's grandest buildings, its eponymous hall large enough, it is said to hold every Dwarf in Haylem should they come to be heard in a Dwarven Moot. The Thane's Army guards its corridors, and the Thane's chambers are opulent with the riches of centuries. Nearby are the city's great Treasury and Armoury, stockpiled with gold, weapons and other riches and guarded as fiercely as the Thane's person.

Each of the clans has its own Hall in the city, large or small depending on the Clan's fortunes. Almost as grand is the Forge of the Master Smith, a vast smithing complex where apprentices train in weapons, armour and other kinds of smithing, and test for the ranks of Master. Non-Dwarves petition often for the opportunity to visit the Master Smith and learn something of their secrets, although it said this honour has never been granted.

The Celestial and Earth Guilds of Khuzud Dul are granted all respect, and the Towers helps maintain this amity by ensuring most of the key positions for the city are held by Dwarven wizards and sages. The Earth Guild has a surprisingly strong tolerance for the Death Watch, the traditional Dwarven society of Earth Casters, and it has become a tradition for at least one of the Death Wardens is also a Sage or Guildmaster. The Death Watch holds the ancient rituals of preparing the Dwarven dead and wrapping their bodies, to ensure that although their bodies remain, they are unable to be raised as undead by the dark arts of necromancy. Outside Khuzud Dul is the Well of Life, the mine shaft into which the Dwarven dead are lowered when their bodies have been prepared.

It comes as no surprise that the vast majority of the city's permanent inhabitants are Dwarves. There are a scattering of Humans, Hobblings, and even a few Stone Elves and Drae, but the city is overwhelmingly Dwarven. The city provides much of its own food through grazing and agriculture on the slopes of the mountain, and gains the rest via trade with Blacas and the smaller settlements in its vicinity. The trade goods of Khuzud Dul come from the mines that riddle the mountain, and the wonders the Dwarves create from its ores and gems. They first settled in Khuzud Dul because of its rich veins of silver and gold, and although many mines are played out, they continue to delve down, often encountering and enduring brief and vicious wars with subterranean monsters when they do. There is a prophecy that when the mines of Khuzud Dul fail the rule of the Thanes shall fail with them.

The other great export of Khuzud Dul is ale. Dwarven breweries are second only to Dwarven crafting in popularity as a vocation among the Clans, and the Khuzud Dul ales are popular throughout Cambria and all of Haylem. The recipes of the Brewmasters are guarded as closely as though of the Master Smiths, and are just as unlikely to be shared with outsiders, welcome as they may be to purchase and enjoy the end results.

Balcarres

People have been fishing the waters around Balcarres for centuries. This easternmost peninsula of Cambria, nestled at the mouth of the Serpentine River where it flows into Lake Persephont, is long-inhabited, but also one of the most isolated corners of the Kingdom. Its primary industries remain what they have always been – forestry and fishing – and although Balcarres is the largest town east of Blacas, it is not very large at all. Primarily occupied by humans whose families have been there for generations, there are also dwarves, hobblings, and scavengers, and even a few Ogrim for whom the isolated area is appealing.

Until about ten years ago, things were better in Balcarres. Although it is buffeted by terrible autumn storms and harsh winters, its spring and summer are cool and pleasant, and it was a favourite holiday spot for the wealthier folk of eastern Ontarius. Each year, they would sail across the lake in large numbers, escaping the heat of the Ontarian summer for the cool forests and blue water of Balcarres. These visitors brought silver with them, and seeing to their needs was an important part of the town's economy, from supplies to guest houses to temporary servants to tours of the lake. Much of the town was carefully boarded up each autumn when it was only the locals again.

Balcarres feels strangely haunted now. The villas that used to house those summer visitors from Ontarius stand empty, and the pleasure boats decay on the pier. In their place, a garrison of the royal navy patrols the waters to protect the locals from any incursions from the Black Waste and keep an eye on the southern shore. It's an unpopular posting, and captains rarely stay long, and the garrison tends to keep itself separate from the locals.

While tales of the Asombroda forest tend to come out of Aieland, the people of Balcarres know it well. The great forest looms close, just across the Serpentine River, and there are many local folktales and superstitions about the creatures that linger there. It's a rare house that doesn't have a charm against the Fox Woman in its window, and the first thing all Balcarren children learn is "never go into the Forest." Now that the Black Waste lies across the water, there is danger on two sides for the folk of Balcarres. Most young people talk of leaving when they are grown, and the older folk worry about the future of their home.

