

Duchy of Ellisel

Up until the Second Necromancer War, the Duchy of Ellisel comprised the counties of Cordeveaux and Benwillow, bordered to the west by the frontier region known then as the Dividian Darklands. At the end of the war, the Crown formally brought those lands into the Duchy of Ellisel with the creation of the County of Kyrinen. The County of Benwillow was folded into Cordeveaux, and Ellisel became the largest Duchy in Haylem. To the Elves of Ellisel, this was no more than their due; many stories tell of their original great Kingdom in the Darklands, and how they fled east to what became Tiefanu and Ardales to rebuild anew.

Ellisel is a region of Elves. The cities were built by the High Elves, the forests are home to many Wild Elven tribes, and it is believed the Mystic Wood is also somewhere within the borders of the Duchy. They came somewhat reluctantly to the Haylem fold during the formation of the Kingdom, but were supporters of the Totemkompf dynasty. Although Kyrinen has one of the most diverse populations in Haylem, including some of the few Barbarians who live outside their granted lands, eastern Ellisel is where the great majority of the Kingdom's High Elves and Wild Elves make their home.

A few years ago, the cataclysmic seismic event that created the Great Chasm sundered Ellisel in half, rendering travel and communication between Kyrinen and the rest of the Duchy a risky and lengthy business. The recent completion of a bridge across the chasm near the Kyrinen town of Innis has done much to mitigate the difficulties, but there can be no denying the wide cultural gap between eastern and western Ellisel that echoes the geographical one.

County Cordeveaux

Cordeveaux is one of the largest Counties in Haylem, having once formed the entirety of Ellisel. Its population, however, comes nowhere near the bustling and highly cultivated Counties of Cambria. Large stretches of Cordeveaux are verdant and untouched forest, fiercely protected by the Wild Elven tribes, and settlements from noble estates to farmsteads are carefully planned to be in harmony with the natural world. Orchards and vineyards are common, and the fine Elven wines of Ellisel are exported throughout the Kingdom.

There is a melancholy aspect to the County. It bears the scars of centuries of decline at the hands of marauding monsters and the undead. The graceful ruins of long-gone cities and palaces, now returning to the wild, scatter the landscape. Some of the scars are fresh. Two cities in the north, Gauttier and Salais, fell during the Second Necromancer War, and have never been rebuilt. After the population was slaughtered, the undead defiled the land and sewed it with salt, and it remains unusable to this day.

This is not to say Cordeveaux is a County in some sort of perpetual decline, however. It has vibrant cities, a thriving cultural life, and its share of forward-thinking Elves and other races determined not to dwell on the past. The County is also quite wealthy, producing luxury goods like wine, perfume, embroidered textiles, jewelry and glassware from many estates and renowned craftspeople in Tiefanu and Ardales.

Tiefanu – Capital of Ellisel

In both the eyes of the Kingdom and the eyes of the High Elves, Tiefanu is the principal city of Ellisel, albeit for different reasons. As the Duchy Capital, Tiefanu is the seat of Ellisel's government and the home of its Duke, a gateway to the northwest of Haylem. As the home of the Palace of the High Elven Queen, it is also the most important cultural site in the Kingdom to the High Elven people.

Often a target when the Kingdom is at war, Tiefanu is protected by graceful stone walls, and even during times of peace the gates are closely guarded, and visitors rarely allowed to pass through them without at least a cursory interview. Those who do not have legitimate business (or, some detractors say, without pointed ears) are often asked to wait before they are admitted entry to the city itself. The citizens of Tiefanu point to the many times the city has been under siege to explain their caution in protecting their home and the treasures of their people.

Tiefanu is a city of Elves – predominantly High Elves, although their various cousins are also greatly in evidence. Non-Elves tend to be attached to the administration of the Duchy and make their home within the compound of the Ducal Hall, or are merchants and craftsmen who make their home in small but vibrant non-Elf corners of the City. There is no official policy that separates Elves from others, but the longevity of their lifespan and the continuity of their families tends to mean that Elven areas of Tiefanu remain Elven, year after year, and newcomers find homes near the markets or the city walls.

The Ducal Hall, seat of the Duke of Ellisel, is a relatively modern building, constructed after the Unification of Haylem to serve as the administrative and bureaucratic hub of the Duchy. It is a curious mix of Elven and Human design, and a clear attempt to prove Tiefanu's commitment to the unified Kingdom and their Human allies, in the face of widespread murmurings that the Elves of Ellisel still put the Elves of Ellisel first.

The Ducal Hall is not, however, the heart of the city. That honour belongs to a much older building, settled gracefully in a small area of forested garden and parkland in the centre of Tiefanu. The Palace of the High Elven Queen – the home of the non-political leader of the High Elves – is, by all reports, an exquisite place, although very few are permitted entry. The current Queen – still just a child – is protected by the order of the Queen's Guard, who patrol the gardens and maintain quarters for their Order in the surrounding buildings. On rare occasions the public are permitted into the gardens, although never closer than that.

Tiefanu houses some of the greatest artists and craftspeople in Ellisel – perhaps even the Kingdom – and is a destination for those seeking the rare and the beautiful. There are districts devoted to various crafts, like the Street of Glass, the Orchard of Starlight and Song, and the Pathway of Revelry, where theatres large and small perform plays and masques. The city is also renowned for its seamstresses and tailors, importing fabrics from throughout the Kingdom. Tiefanu has several fine libraries, and scholars with centuries of knowledge and experience. The Earthen and Celestial Guilds are each graced with large compounds, where scholars of both schools study.

The farmlands surrounding the city are fertile and long-cultivated, providing fine wines, a variety of fruits, and food for the city. The various markets within Tiefanu are busy places, although perhaps more sedate than their counterparts in Haylem City. The region does not provide much food for export, however, and the Great Chasm has changed the trade routes for agricultural goods from Kyrinen, which now often bypass the area and go directly to Cambria. It has been a source of some upheaval to the local economy, although most residents are unwilling to discuss the matter, or to imply that Tiefanu need rely on Kyrinen for trade.

Ardales – Former Capital of Benwillow

The city of Ardales is old by human standards, built many centuries ago, but to the Elves it is a new and cosmopolitan settlement. Curving gracefully around the shore, it sees a great deal of trade from across the waters in Cambria, and boasts a much more varied population than Tiefanu. Humans and hobblings from Cambria, Stone Elves and Biata from across the mountains in Aieland, and a scattering of other races make their home in this port city.

The city's location includes a well-protected bay for mooring the lake boats so important to its economy, but the shoreline is an uncertain one, primarily a lagoon unsuitable for traditional buildings. Rather than dredge the water, Ardales' original buildings instead drove pilings deep into the silt and built on platforms of wood and stone, forming a series of graceful bridges and elegant canals that are the main thoroughfares of the lower city. In fact, the only way to navigate the lower city is by foot or by canal boat.

The buildings of the lower city are elegant three and four story structures of stone, and it is often hard to tell at a glance what lies within – whether it a warehouse, the home of a noble or wealthy merchant, or a series of apartments. Real estate in the Lower City is greatly coveted and jealously guarded by those who have it, despite the fact that the air is fresher and the buildings larger in the Upper City built on more solid ground. Keeping the city and canals in good repair is an important and constant task and a source of employment for many masons and engineers.

The Upper City has two distinct areas – the County seat, a sprawling complex of private and public buildings overlooking the lagoon and built at the same time as the canals, and then the newer part of the city, where overland caravans can be unloaded and stabled, the Earth and Celestials Guilds make their home, and the bureaucratic business of the County tends to be done. It is a strange truth that living in the Upper City is considered fairly undesirable, despite how crowded and constantly in need of repair the Lower City is. The Count himself is well-known to consider his estate an unfortunate duty, and keeps an apartment by the water where he prefers to spend his time.

Fleets head out daily to fish the waters of the lake, while barges travel across its expanse and back again to trade goods with Cambria. It is also an important hub for trade within Cordeveaux, connecting to Chalan in the north and Tiefanu to the southwest. Ardales is well known for its glassware and perfume, as well as embroidered silk, tapestry weaving, and other fine arts. Music and theatre are popular past-times, and visitors to the city rarely leave without attending a performance of some sort. Festivals are celebrated widely and with great enthusiasm across the city, with many young High Elves travelling there each year to celebrate the Feast of the Summer Elves and their coming of age.

The only melancholy note in Ardales is a beautiful memorial in one of the oldest squares of the Lower City. While it was only built a few years ago, the Artisan sculptor who created it blended the stone perfectly with the graceful buildings and fountains of Ardales. A group of Elves, with the recognizable faces of the deceased Baron Armande (Prince Armande to the High Elven people) and his Court, turn their faces west towards the lost Elven kingdoms, and to where they fell to the Pantherghast in Thrush Peake. It is visited often by visitors to the city.

Of the Elven cities of Cordeveaux, Ardales is by far the most cosmopolitan and welcoming to outsiders. Visitors and kingdom officials alike have been known to grumble that the business of the Duchy would be much easier to conduct in a city like Ardales than in staunchly traditional Tiefanu.

Chalan

The north of Ellisel was ravaged during the Second Necromancer War. The cities of Gauttier and Salais have never been rebuilt, which leaves Chalan as the main settlement once one travels north from Ardales. Chalan itself suffered bitterly during the conflict, much of the city burned to the ground or occupied and despoiled by undead forces. Years later, it is still a city in the process of rebuilding.

Before the war, Chalan was known as “The Forest City.” Its buildings incorporated the trees of the northern forests; great halls rose around ancient oaks, while stone walkways were constructed high above the ground, weaving amongst the trees above their roots and below their leaves. The stone tower of Hall of the Sky pierced the canopy of the forest itself, and the views in autumn sunlight and winter moon were

immortalized in song and tapestry. It was never a large city, but was one of the few urban settlements that had a high population of Wild Elves.

Rather than rush construction on the districts that were destroyed, Chalan took a different path. While engineers and architects focused on careful planning and sourcing of materials, an exquisite temporary city sprung up in place of what was lost. Silken pavilions, treated with alchemy for sturdiness and warmed inside by braziers, glow like so many lanterns amongst the trees, and provide housing for the people of the city. Permanent buildings in the parts of the city not destroyed by the undead have been repurposed for more public use, becoming Guild halls, schools, warehouses and offices to the magistrates and local nobility. The communal flavor of life necessary in the aftermath of the war still remains ten years later.

Centuries ago, one of the High Elven race's few Artisans – Elves imbued with magic mostly lost to time – convinced the oaks and yews at the perimeter of the city to grow close together, intertwining into a living wall patrolled by the city watch and carefully tended. The repair of the living walls is the great task of the renowned Chalan Foresters, and it will be many years before they are as they once were.

As the largest settlement in northern Cordeveaux, Chalan is necessary to trade, with both goods from the south and now across the bridge from Innis. Wild Elves bring in trade goods from all over the northern forests to Chalan, and engage in barter and sale in its markets. Chalan is known throughout Ellisel as a place to find rare and unusual herbs with alchemical and magical properties, as well delicate blends of Elven tea that makes their way to shops throughout Haylem.

The rebuilding has brought many craftspeople to the area, offering their services and wares to aid with the task. The generous support of the Duchy has ensured there are enough funds to pay them, and work continues all year round in one form or another.

County Kyrinen

The County Kyrinen is outlined in a separate document.

