

Duchy of Aieland

Enclosed by mountains to the north and west, and the Serpentine River and the vast Asambroda forest to the east, the Duchy of Aieland is one of the more isolated regions of the Kingdom, despite the border of populous Cambria to the south. The homeland of the long-lived Stone Elves and Biata, it has ancient cities in mountain fastnesses, repositories of great knowledge and learning, and areas of remote and unspoiled beauty. Aieland's recent history is tumultuous, and the secession of the mountain city of Casea to the rebel Sharin Biata has put a strain on the Duchy's resources and governance, especially in County Junghe.

Aieland produces tea, rice, silk and a variety of other foodstuffs. Many mines in County Wellfield are still workable despite the long inhabitation of the area, and the trade in precious metals and gems is small but valuable. The capital of Aieland is Krylia, and the Duchy is comprised of two counties - Wellfield and Junghe. The capital of County Wellfield is Yavane, and the capital of County Junghe is Condora.

County Wellfield

The western County of Aieland is its most populous, and hosts the Duchy's capital, the city of Krylia. Wellfield has the largest population of Stone Elves in the Kingdom, especially in the capital city and several smaller settlements like Trailla in the mountains that border the County to the north and the west. Biata are also very much in evidence, with such cultural touchstones as the Great Library being found in the eastern part of the County, north of Yavane.

The rest of the inhabitants are a mix of races, with a strong showing from High Elves, humans, and Dwarves. South of the mountains, Wellfield boasts fertile farmland that has been cultivated for centuries, well-maintained trade roads, and many centres of learning and magic. From the Great Library to the Earthen Tower to the Great College of the Stone Elves, it could be argued that one of the greatest exports of the County is knowledge.

The Earthen Tower looms large over the County. Built into the mountains, far from the urban centres, it is like a city unto itself. Under its watchful eye, Earth Guilds are well-staffed and highly respected in each community, often playing host to visiting researchers from the Tower. Anyone foolish enough to truck with necromancy does so under the eye of some of the most powerful Earthen casters in the Kingdom, not to mention within reach of the headquarters of the Hand of the Earth itself. Needless to say, troubles of that sort are rare.

Krylia – Capital of Aieland

The city's modern name is a misspelling of the ancient Stone Elf word for their people – the Krylia. While many Stone Elves would prefer if the city was known by its more ancient titles, they are pragmatic enough to acknowledge that the name has been so long in use and so widely that there is little purpose in changing it now. In its early life, Krylia was a Stone Elf trading city, and their influence is still widely seen in its architecture and landmarks.

Krylia is commonly divided into two regions - the Old City and the New City. In the Old City, the logic and orderliness of Stone Elf society is still clearly felt. Streets are wide and organized into districts, with

central squares for public gatherings and trade. In the centre of the Old City is what is now the Ducal Palace, originally the complex of buildings where the High Council of the Stone Elves met with merchants, ambassadors and emissaries from other races and nations. While some consider the white stone and clean lines of traditional Stone Elf architecture needlessly austere, many more find it soothing and meditative to the spirit. The meditation gardens of the Old City are open to the public, and a key point of interest to many visitors.

Outside the walls of the Old City sprawls the New City, and the distinctions are immediately obvious. “New City” is slightly misleading, as parts of outer Krylia are centuries old, but to the long lived Stone Elves and Biata ‘new’ is a relative term. As it transformed over time from a Stone Elven trading centre to a city-state in its own right, Krylia outgrew the borders of the Old City. To the dismay of many Stone Elf architects, the New City is purpose-built, growing in fits and starts over the century to meet the changing needs and population of the area. In the New City, the large library is often mistaken by visitors as the Great Library of the Biata itself, but it is in fact only a satellite of the august institution. Biata architecture is much in evidence, a terraced and ornamented counterpart to the Old City’s austerity.

In recent years, when Aieland was visited by civil unrest, undead troubles, and an invasion of werewolves, rural peasants flocked to the safety the capital city represented, and Krylia grew yet again. New wooden houses, outdoor marketplaces, warehouses and inns have sprung up like mushrooms around the fringes of the New City, and even though times are more peaceful, the population has not diminished. There is a certain amount of friction between the Old City and the New City - the Old City denizens see the New City as an eyesore and a hotbed of crime, while the New City folk feel their needs are not often taken into account by the nobility of Krylia.

Krylia’s main business now is the business of running the Duchy. Much of its population is employed in the service of the Ducal Palace, from guards and servants to an extensive and well-trained bureaucratic staff of career civil servants. The splintering of the city of Casea to the Sharin has meant an increase in responsibility for the capital while the Eastern County reorganizes its nobility and governance to the smaller city of Condora. Many visiting scholars also make Krylia their base before venturing further afield to the Earthen Tower, the Great Library, or the Great College. Many inns and guesthouses cater to this quieter sort of clientele.

Yavane

If Krylia is Aieland’s mind, Yavane is its beating commercial heart. Not so much a city as a trading town that simply wouldn’t stop growing, Yavane the centre of trade and travel for the entire Duchy. Officially the capital of County Wellfield and the home of the County Court, it is the most diverse and cosmopolitan town in Aieland. The nobility there have close ties with Cambria and Haylem City, maintaining numerous trade agreements that keep goods flowing into and out of Aieland.

Yavane sits on the Cambrian Way, the main trade artery in Aieland. From the town the road splits into three - one road to Condora, one road to Krylia and one road that until recent years brought goods north to Casea.

The town grew up around a large seasonal marketplace at the crossroads. Originally, farmers and merchants set up caravans and temporary shelters while they traded each season. Over time inns, stables and taverns began to be built, evolving first into a village surrounding the marketplace, and eventually to a sprawling town full of warehouses, marketplaces, counting houses and shops. It says a lot about Yavane that institutions like the Earth Guild, the Celestial Guild and the County Courts are found at the outskirts of the town, the centre still being a bustling market.

While there are still a large number of Stone Elves and Biata in the area, the population of Yavane is diverse, with Humans, Hobblings and Dwarves all having a strong presence. The town is purpose-built, with more buildings of wood than of stone, and a variety of architectural styles and influences. The city walls are stout timber, and need to be rebuilt every few years when there is another burst of expansion. Many of the locals make their living running inns and taverns, catering to the constant stream of merchants travelling in both directions, or meeting in Yavane to buy and sell.

It's said the Yavane market is never truly closed, from the first farmers arriving before dawn with fresh produce to the late-night gambling that's rumoured to have put an end to one mercantile fortune or another. People from all over Haylem - and beyond - travel to Yavane to purchase mountain tea or silk harvests to take back to haberdashers and tea shops as far away as Catania. The tariffs and taxes brought in by the County are a major factor in Yavane's wealth, and smuggling is ruthlessly stamped out by the local Watch whenever they discover it

They don't always discover it, however. Unsurprisingly for such a diverse mercantile hub, Yavane has a thriving underworld of shady importers and dealers in illicit goods (much of Condora's black market trade in magic and alchemy leaves the Duchy through Yavane). The city is also well known for being a place to buy information and obtain false documents and papers; the rumour is that much of Yavane's underworld is ruled over by a disgraced Biata librarian from the Great Library, who leverages centuries of knowledge and contacts on the black market.

When much of Aieland rose up in rebellion against the King, in the civil uprising that would lead to the secession of Casea, Yavane was notable in its loyalty to the crown. Most other cities in Aieland saw fighting in the streets between loyalists and rebels, but Yavane was steadfast in support of Haylem. Although it could not muster an army to match the rebel troops, Yavane was closed to them as they marched on Cambria and was a headquarters for Kingdom forces as the last pockets of rebellion were rooted out.

Trailla

Despite being one of Aieland's largest cities, Trailla is the least likely to be visited by outsiders. Nestled high in the western mountains, near the Duchy's borders, the Stone Elf city is remote and difficult to reach. Most of the inhabitants of Trailla are perfectly content that it is so. While not as unwelcoming to outsiders as the Ryu Chen, Trailla is ancient and set in its ways, and those ways are resolutely Stone Elven. They make almost the entirety of the permanent population of Trailla, with only a few exceptions among the merchants and scholars of the city.

About one quarter of Trailla sits on the side of a mountain, terraces of stone streets curving with great artistry and ingenuity thousands of feet above the base of the peak. An outsider must climb a curving road, little more than a path, up the mountain to reach the stone gates, which are always closed. A small guardhouse, built into the mountain wall, receives and vets every visitor before the gates are opened to allow them inside. The guardhouse is small, but the ramparts above are always manned by a full contingent of soldiers. The dangers of the mountains can be many, and aid would take a long time to reach the city.

Those who have more knowledge of Trailla know the other three quarters of the city are carved out of the inside of the mountain itself, and that there is a city gate at the base of the mountain through which one can enter with much less peril (although just as much scrutiny). It is often as far as traders get, for the lowermost level of the city contains great warehouses for storing food and other goods, and much of the city's business with outsiders can be completed here.

Above these warehouses, in which goods for the city are communally stored and then made available to the city's merchants at a set list of prices, rises the inner city of Trailla. A central road spirals on a gentle slope up through the hollow mountain, making it possible for wagons to make the climb. As an alternative, the Water Way is a pair of lifts that can reach each level of the city, a marvel of engineering that utilizes an underground waterfall and is as beautiful as it is functional.

Most of the Stone Elf dwellings are modest and serene, with small terraces laid out for meditation. Each level of the city has the necessary amenities for those who live there, including shops, schools, and library. A system of light shafts and mirrors angle sunlight deep into the mountain, and alchemical and mundane lights do the rest. Logic and simplicity abound throughout the city, and has done for the many centuries since it was first built.

The mountain terraces of outer Trailla are used for a variety of purposes. Rooftops are often given over to the propagation of herbs and plants that need more direct sunlight than the inner city can provide, and many of the buildings are cunning greenhouses or studios for those artisans who depend on natural light. The twin maxims of the city are harmony and order, and nothing is built that is not logical in use and yet calming to the senses.

Other than merchants, what visitors there are, come for Trailla's greatest source of renown - the Great College. One of Aieland's great historical rivalries is between the Great College of the Stone Elves and the Great Library of the Biata, both of which claim to be the paramount centre of learning in all the world. While the Great Library is a repository, and its explorers bring new tales and tomes back to its vaults and holdings, the Great College is a place of learning, where the greatest value is placed on the relationship between teacher and student, in logical debate and the examination of philosophy and history through discussion.

The Great College is the largest building in Trailla, comprising areas in both the inner and outer city. Lecture halls, libraries, studies and amphitheatres are filled with scholars, students and teachers, in every discipline from magic to rhetoric. Stone Elves from Trailla who travel throughout the world are encouraged to bring their experiences back to the Great College, to be recorded and transcribed and to increase the College's understanding as a body. The Great College also provides teachers for all the children of Trailla, making it one of the most learned and literate cities in all of Aieland, and indeed all of Haylem.

County Junghe

The eastern County of Aieland is far less populated than the west, with settlements growing smaller and smaller the closer to the Serpentine River and the vast Asambroda forest one gets. This is a traditional Biata territory, and the population reflects that history. It is not unusual for a village to have only a handful of non-Biata residents, or even none at all. The kind of greeting a traveler will receive varies from village to village, with some welcoming strangers and news from far away, while others reveal the strain of xenophobia so unfortunate in Aieland's history.

While the great family seats of Biata clans are generally found in the mountains, the fertile lakes, valleys, and bamboo forests of County Junghe often owe traditional allegiances to this noble family or that one. Local nobility from these families tend to take on responsibility for the security and safety of an area, even if their manors in Junghe are more traditionally summer homes. Although the local Watch are officially under the jurisdiction of the King and the Chivalry, in the sparsely populated villages of Junghe they still tend to look to the nobility for both direction and support.

The recent civil conflict that resulted in the secession of the city of Casea and its environs to the radical Sharin left County Junghe without a capital city and disrupted its trade and bureaucracy in ways that are still being felt. Many of the nobility whose lands were in the County sided with the Sharin and now live in exile from their former homes. Newly-made nobles, loyal to the Duchy and the Crown, have been granted the lands of these traitors, and often find themselves facing a hostile populace still loyal to the families that protected them for centuries. It is rumoured that during the werewolf troubles of AU 26, it was patrols from Sharin, not from Haylem, that kept much of Junghe safe.

Most denizens of County Junghe are farmers or fisher folk. The lakes and rivers of Junghe are renowned for their fish, which is exported throughout Aieland. Rice is the primary grain produced by the farmers of Junghe, although there are also many large tea plantations where the famous Aieland tea leaves are harvested, as well as varieties of greens and fruit. Mulberry plantations produce exquisite silk. In the few settlements that are found near the Serpentine River and the Asambroda, there is a thriving trade in rare herbs and magical plants found only near that legendary (and very dangerous) forest. The explorers who dare those borders risk their lives, but the yield for even a few potent blossoms is considered worth the risk.

Banditry has often been a difficulty in the County, especially during bad harvests or periods of unrest. Trade goods, Kingdom officials collecting taxes, and wealthy travelers must journey through isolated stretches of forest to reach Condora or Yavane, making them prime targets for brigands. As the bandits often come from the very farms and fishing villages where investigations into their activities begin, rooting them out is a tricky business.

Condora

Condora is the easternmost city in Aieland, and although it is (with the secession of Casea) the largest settlement in Junghe County, its population is small compared to Krylia or even Yavane. While the County Court of Junghe is now in residence, it is very much a work in progress to rebuild the bureaucracy that was once so ably handled from Casea in the mountains. The loss of vital documents with the history of land ownership, trade agreements, and legal decisions has been somewhat nightmarish to the clerks trying to run the County, and the monthly Courts are swamped with land disputes and other wrangling.

Condora never aspired to be a seat of power in Aieland. Rather, this small but beautiful city was known as a bucolic refuge, a place of learning and art and poetry. Many noble families kept a house in Condora, retreating there for extended holidays when the weather in the mountains grew too harsh, or the bustle of the larger cities too much. As a result, the rolling hills and bamboo forests around the city are home to many miniature estates, and the city itself is carefully laid out with public gardens, theatres, and elegant townhouses. The poor in Condora live discreetly off the main the streets and at the city's edges, lest its reputation as a cultural haven be tarnished.

Many renowned artisans and artists make their home in Condora, often with the patronage of one of Aieland's noble families. Poets, painters, and calligraphers have studios on the legendary Street of Gentle Musing, while in the Jade Courtyard aspiring and renowned musicians alike play for any who gather. There are several theatres, showcasing both traditional Biata forms and visiting troupes from throughout Haylem.

This is not to say Condora doesn't have its share of regular trade. Local farms and fishermen supply the city, and surplus travels down the trade road to Yavane in County Wellfield. The herbalists and alchemists of Condora are well known for their access to rare (and exceedingly expensive) herbs and plants. But more than anything else, the trade good of Condora is the humble tea leaf. The tea district of

Condora produces some of the most popular blends of tea in the entire Kingdom, and some of the most expensive. In addition to the tea wholesalers and merchants, there are dozens of exquisite teahouses, catering to the genteel denizens of the city. Certain tea blends are so rare and valuable that their composition is a closely guarded family secret.

Also located within Condora is eastern Aieland's largest library, connected, as most libraries in Aieland are, to the Great Library itself. The collections at the Condora Library specialize in folklore and history from the Asambroda forest, alchemy and potion lore, and the arts, boasting an extraordinary archive of poetry and paintings from throughout the Kingdom and its races. The ill-fated Great Library expeditions into the Asambroda forest have always set out from this library, although no expedition has ever returned.

On the surface, Condora is an orderly and sedate city, in keeping with its history as a retreat for the wealthy. The City Guard is quick to break up any nonsense that occurs in its streets and taverns, and the city's Seneschal makes city beautification a priority. However, it is a well-known but rarely mentioned truth that Condora has a thriving black market for alchemical and magical components, antiquities of dubious provenance, and news and missives from Sharin. Discreet arrests are made by the Celestial and Earthen Towers whenever breaches of law related to Hedgewizardry or Necromancy are discovered, but otherwise this shadow economy is generally allowed to continue.

