

Duchy of Taleria

Taleria is a region of diversity. While populated by a mix of Drae, Dwarves, Humans, Hobblings, Ogrim, and Sarr, the region is most known for The Horde of Half Orcs which reside there. The land itself represents this diversity as well, ranging from mountains to desert, jungle to steppe and plains. It also maintains the longest coastline of the Duchies, lying on both the Southern Sea and the Mars Pentencia.

Taleria is known for its strong military under the leadership of Duke Yoru no Takahiro. While the Kingdom of Haylem does not bear their name, the people of Taleria do not forget that the royal line Totemkompf ruled Taleria long before unification. Taleria is a land under constant threat. South is the Treshelling Empire, West are the Black Wastes, and to the East are The Dunes and Ilsa Shemizad. In many ways Taleria is the first line of defense for the Kingdom of Haylem for most external threats to the realm.

Like all things in Taleria, the cultural and economic diversity of Taleria differs from region to region. Major economic sectors within the Duchy as a whole are Agriculture (Animal Husbandry/Herding), Mining (Coal/Iron/Precious Metals), Fisheries (Coastal), and the Military (Arms and Armour).

Taleria is composed of two Counties, Darkholm and Camden. The capital city of Taleria is Koniggradz, while the county capitals are Ryu Chen for County Darkholm and Eschenbach for County Camden.

County Darkholm

County Darkholm is the more built-up half of Taleria, and the closest to the rest of Haylem, bordered by the Dividian Plains to the North, County Camden to the South and West, Cambria to the Northeast, the Southern Sea to the Southeast, and Ontarius to the East. County Darkholm's fertile farmland and bustling towns are distinct from those of other Counties for two reasons. First, due to Taleria's southern location the climate is warmer. The climate varies from lush forest to arid desert. Exotic plants and animals which would wither in the cooler climates of the other Duchies are commonplace in this part of Taleria.

Second, County Darkholm is far more racially diverse than most other Counties. The homelands of Drae, Sarr, and Half-Orcs are all located within County Darkholm, and many thriving towns and villages composed predominantly of these races surround the central cities detailed below. Hobblings, Dwarves, Ogrim, Scavengers, and other races are also common here. With the exception of the area around Koniggradz, Humans exist only as a minority. The cultural diversity of County Darkholm produces a very rich experience of art, trade, and communication, but to an outsider unused to such diversity, it can be overwhelming at times.

Koniggradz ~ Capital of Taleria

The Capital city of Taleria is located relatively close to the border of Cambria. Some have said that the choice of Koniggradz as the Capital of Taleria was mainly for political reasons, with a higher percentage of Humans than other cities in Taleria. The reality of the matter is that the City has strong defenses, is centrally located, and can be supported in case of invasion. In addition to this, the agriculture based economy of the city is more consistent and able to better support the other cities in the County in times of drought and famine.

Classically constructed, the majority of Koniggradz consists of orderly and well defensible buildings, and several rows of city walls. The three major walls consist of the Außenring, Innenring, Königering. (Outer Ring, Inner Ring, King's Ring). The three walls are ovals centering on the administrative buildings and the estates of the Duke. Historically the Duke's residence has been the anchor for the community, and as the city expanded, the city sprawled and new walls were needed. The central location of the Duke's residence helps to foster a sense of unity with the nobility. There is currently talk of constructing a new wall, often referred to as the Geistwände, (Ghost Wall). The name is because it would be a defense against the Undead, and because it has not been built yet.

Also of note is the artificial lake which lies on the ducal estates in the centre of the city. The two rivers which flow near the city were diverted and joined together within the city to create the lake on the Duke's estate, as well as irrigate the local farms.

Residents of Koniggradz are staunch believers in the feudal system, and as a whole have risen up at the call of their Duke to defend their homes. Recent Dukes have used this to their advantage, and have gone to great lengths to amplify the support of the people, creating a general populace that are obedient and zealous. Koniggradz has one the highest percentage of volunteers for service on the Watch, as well as the highest percentage of those who reenlist.

The city is known for its extensive farms outside the city proper, and it is the only city in Taleria with an agricultural base capable of supplying the entire city; all other cities require at least partial imports of food from the outlying communities or other Duchies. Koniggradz is a major trade centre in the Southern parts of Haylem and is a large thoroughfare for anyone traveling to Cambria or the Barbarian Concessions.

Due to the ringed nature of the city, a certain amount of segregation occurs. Each community, be they Hobblings, Half-Orcs, or High Elves, has their own enclave and adds their own style to their portion of the city to the benefit of all. While the borders of these areas tend to change and move over time, the city has a permanent, designated area for the Elven people, who maintain a permanent embassy within the region. The Elven Enclave is truly a marvel to behold, as it incorporates the traditional style of the Elves with aspects of other cultures interspersed. It is a truly multicultural city, with nothing more indicative of this than the Grand Bazaar. The Grand Bazaar is a massive labyrinthine market, where vendors regularly move their stalls around, and it is said that if you look hard enough, anything can be found in the Bazaar.

Ryu Chen - Capital of the County of Darkholm

Located within Mt. Kakurega at the convergence of the King's Head and Western Redstone Rivers, the City of Ryu Chen is a marvel to behold. As the King's Head River and the Western Redstone River flow towards the Southern Sea, they converge under Mt. Kakurega in the Dark Lake. The two rivers reach a confluence as they reach the mountain, and flow as one into the subterranean Dark Lake. The lake then drains out the south side of the mountain in a massive waterfall, known as Goryu Falls, over the cliffs into the Southern Sea.

There are several entrances into the city, and while all are guarded, in many cases this is for the safety of visitors unfamiliar with the subterranean city, rather than a need to control access. Arriving in Ryu Chen is often described as arriving in another world. The main gate, known as the 'Dragon's Gate', is carved into the side of the mountain itself. A set of iron doors and a portcullis are set into the stone archway, which features an intricately carved bas-relief of a dragon, winding across the entrance. Intricate staircases are carved into the sides of the mountain, winding up from the 'Dragon's Gate' up to other entrances to the city. The entire inside of the mountain has been hollowed out, and the stone used to create wave breaks and barriers to counter the natural erosion of the adjoining cliffs.

From the height of the entrance you can see over the entirety of the city proper. Giant white crystal pillars run from the ground to the ceiling up above, in some places up to 100 feet. They appear to have formed naturally, but have been carved into beautiful designs, and appear almost organic. Much of the ceiling is covered in an effervescent moss, and several large areas seem to glow with luminescent fungi. As the light is reflected from the crystal pillars it seems to ebb and flow, and created the illusion that the pillars themselves are flexing like muscles and that the mountain itself is breathing. The majority of the light inside the city comes from windows carved in the sides of the mountain itself, and more lanterns than you have ever seen.

From this perspective, it is evident that the city is divided into several sections. The city itself contains no less than 11 of the 14 Drae Houses, which represent the major families of influence within Drae culture. Each of these has their own lands within the city, and has their territory walled off by ornamental walls to denote the House's 'estate'. Within each of these 'estates' lies a multitude of homes and businesses, and in addition to Kingdom Law, the estates have their own expected code for visitors to abide by while on their land. The largest of the Houses, often referred to as "The Three" each have elaborate academic, magical and martial academies on their lands, and being offered enrollment is considered a prestigious honour throughout the Kingdom. Each estate is further broken down into the private Shogun's lands, a business section, a traveler's quarter and residences for the citizens.

Drae are not the only inhabitants of Ryu Chen, though, and there are large sections of land that appear in stark contrast to the ordered and structured nature of the estates. 'The Villages' is the term given colloquially to any of the smaller stretches of the city outside of the House estates, which are inhabited by non-Drae, with races often grouping together. For example, if you were looking for a Dwarven Smith, you would be directed to the Dwarven Village of Ryu Chen.

The population of the city is mixed, but heavily dominated by Drae. Ryu Chen's sheer volume of Drae tends to influence the city's major import/export market. While most major types of business are represented in the city, Fisheries, Fine Arts, Raw Silk and cultivated Fungi are the lead exports, while Lumber, Top Soil, and Food/Drink are primary imports.

Other than mushrooms and the local fisheries, the only major food industry native to Ryu Chen is the 'Dragon Hatchling Steak'. The 'Steaks' are actually made from fillets of the blind, translucent Slime Worms which are harvested from around stalactites in caves adjoining the city. The Slime Worm is a predator which hangs from stalactites, drops onto its prey, and proceeds to swallow it whole. While Slime Worm steaks are particularly tasty, the market for them was hurt by the name and appearance of the animal, and in AU 6 it was rebranded as 'Dragon Hatchling Steak' causing the market to soar.

The Festival of Lights is held annually during the week of Summer Equinox. Games stalls and food carts line the thoroughfares, and it is a time of celebration and unity amongst all the Houses and Villages alike. During the Festival, bioluminescent cave fish are sold in hanging fishbowls as lanterns, and vibrant paints are made from some of the glowing fungi, such as Foxfire. Although generally very dim, in some cases Foxfire is bright enough to read by.

Bats inhabit the walls of and tunnels of Ryu Chen, but they do not play a major role in any of the agriculture or trade for the city. Some residents do eat bats, and the guano is necessary for much of the fungi and moss growth, but the population of bats is largely unmanaged until a cull is needed to thin the numbers. Glow worms and several species of troglobite lizards also make the city their home, but are not farmed for commercial purposes.

Gonbricht

Gonbricht is in the desert but uniquely placed near the edge of diverse and lush mixed forest system, as well as the shores of Lake Antagorria and its accompanying watershed. The forest beside the city is known as the Ahyan Aik, often called the Ahyan Jungle by non-locals, despite not being a traditional tropical jungle. The City of Gonbricht itself is well-defended by deep trenches, thick wooden palisades, stone walls for the city proper, and of course, the dense jungle itself. The trenches also serve to divert additional runoff and prevent flooding from Lake Antagorria. Experts in the field have puzzled for centuries at the proximity of rich forest to the arid desert but all agree that there must be some magic at play.

The centre of Gonbricht lies on an elevated plateau, with several large and ancient stone structures depicting important events in Sarr history. Originally these structures served as memorials to fallen kin and platforms for ritual magic, but many are in ruins and only a few survive intact in the present day. In more recent years the surviving memorials have become multi-purpose areas for daily life and city management. Also on the plateau is a large central market, where the inhabitants gather daily for trade.

The rest of Gonbricht has spread across the landscape, adapting to the topography, as opposed to trying to conquer the land. There is little 'city planning', and as such Gonbricht is a sprawling area, with a number of homes located beyond the walls of the city proper. It is believed that there

are many ruins further out in the Ahyan Aik, remnants of older portions of the city, but there have been few successful expeditions to find them.

Gonbricht is an important crossroads of trade, strategically located at the West of County Darkholm. It serves as the marketing center for the surrounding agricultural area, as well as the resources of the Jungle. The proximity to Lake Antagorria allows goods to be transported east towards Konniggradz, Haylem City and Lake Persephont. Maintaining diplomatic relations with the Barbarians is vital to the region, as the quicker routes to the markets of Ellisel and County Kyrinen lie to the North, through the Dividian Plains.

The city is famous for its long-haired Ahyan Goat and its prized wool, as well as the many goods that are harvested from the Ahyan Aik. These include spices (Saffron, Vanilla, Nutmeg), fruits and nuts (Pistachio, Almond, Figs, Pears, Olives), specialized woods (Yew, Ironwood, Silk Tree, Olive), medicine (Aloe Vera, Chamomile), and animal products (Claws, Teeth, Venom, Meat, Hides).

The Ahyan Aik is composed of temperate broadleaf and mixed forests and is an area of lush lowland and montane forests covering a large area near the southern shores of Lake Antagorria. Sarr culture dictates that there are several areas within the Aik which are considered private and off limits to outsiders, but due to the dense nature of the forest and the various dangers within, few people would even be able to find these areas without a guide. A main feature of the region is the lack of conifers; only relics of coniferous species are present, which include the Yew and Juniper.

Nagelstedt

Nagelstedt is not as large as the other major cities in Taleria, but this does not necessarily mean it is less prosperous or busy. Nagelstedt is a city devoted largely to trade, bartering and travel. Due to its unique positioning, Nagelstedt has unfettered access to the seas and the trade routes therein, as well as a direct route to Haylem City and the Black Wastes. While there are many merchants and seasonal workers in the city, there are a lower proportion of actual residents. Due to the nature of the community, residents of Nagelstedt are often drawn away from the city, out of necessity, due to the need for trade, or out of a wanderlust that seems to plague the youth of the city. In addition, the Half-Orc Horde, which resides on the outskirts of the city, is transient. The Horde will often relocate depending on where they can be of service to the Duke, and where they can sustain themselves. There are very few Scavengers, Ogrim, or Dwarves in the city proper, but they maintain a presence amongst the Privateers. The largest portions of the city other than Half-Orcs are Human, Elf and Hobling, with smaller sections dedicated to members of Drae and Biata merchant castes.

The most unique feature of the city is that it is built almost entirely along the tip of a peninsula. While most cities sprawl out concentrically, Nagelstedt has expanded along the coastline and into the sea. Some local merchants have even experimented with creating false islands in the sea to keep their ships from having to dock, saving time and money. The city proper is situated on a group of 76 small islands separated by canals and linked by bridges, and is located on the tip of the Talerian Peninsula.

Nagelstedt is an important center of commerce in Southern Taleria, and its port is especially vital for shipping local goods quickly throughout the kingdom. The economy of Nagelstedt is mainly based on imports and exports, with a strong focus on locally farmed shellfish, spices grown locally and harvested from the sea (such as salt), and goods brought in from trade with foreign nations. Grain, glassware, shipbuilding services, and travel also play an important role in the economy of Southern Taleria as a whole.

There is an active force of adventurers who patrol the waters and protect trade from pirates, monsters, and foreign powers. These are known as the Nagelstedt Privateers, or colloquially as “The Captains”. The mainland holdings of Nagelstedt are fortified against attack from land by two stone walls and three moats, which separate the mainland from the islands.

The Lord of the city is advised by the Silver Council, which is made up of members of the prominent merchant and noble families of Nagelstedt. The Silver Council consists of 12 members, nominated annually, and is influential in all decisions based around trade in the city. One seat on the Silver Council is reserved for a representative of the Nagelstedt Privateers each year. Though it is not codified in the law, at least two seats have always held by representatives of the leader of The Horde.

Many of the buildings of Nagelstedt are constructed on closely spaced wooden piles. Most of these piles are still intact after centuries of submersion. The foundations rest on the piles, and buildings of brick or stone sit above these footings. The piles penetrate a softer layer of sand and mud until they reach a much harder layer of compressed clay. The continental shelf surrounding the Southern end of the Talerian Peninsula has large areas of shallow depth, which allow the expansion of the city, but still has open channels where the shelf drops off sharply, allowing sea-faring ships access to the city without risking running aground.

Nagelstedt has a humid subtropical climate with cool winters and very warm summers. The population of Nagelstedt is appropriately diverse for a coastal port, with a small proportion of residents who maintain residence in the city year round. The majority come and go as dictated by military, business and trade obligations.

County of Camden

County Camden is the more remote half of Taleria, a wild land of nomads and isolated hamlets. It is also the most southerly part of Haylem, bordered by County Darkholm to the Northeast, the Southern Sea to the Southeast, and a range of high, forbidding mountains at the coast of the Mars Penitencia to the West.

The Southwest corner of County Camden connects with a large southern continent, but the crossing is difficult to make for a number of reasons. Difficult terrain, including parched desert and steep mountain cliffs, turns back all but the best-prepared travelers. Treshelling's military also patrols below the crossing with the intent of stopping outsiders, spies, or invaders who might come from Haylem to cause trouble in Treshelling's empire. While there is some trade with Treshelling during times of peace, most of it takes place by boat across the Southern Sea rather than venturing across this ominous border.

The northeastern part of County Camden, along the border with County Darkholm, is the most fertile and well-populated part and shares County Darkholm's lush vegetation. Most of the settlements in County Camden, including its two largest cities, are situated somewhere along this strip of good land. Further south and west, the land begins to dry out due to a rain shadow effect from the highest parts of western Haylem's mountains. Central County Camden features wide-open plains which meld into a genuine desert in the most southerly parts of the county.

Many of the inhabitants of these drier and less fertile areas, as well as the mountains themselves, are nomads. County Darkholm's western mountains are home to the largest population of Ogrim in Haylem and are thought by some to be the birthplace of the Ogrim or the home of an ancient Ogrim civilization, though no record of such an ancient civilization remains. Bands of Listani and Half-Orcs, as well as human (and humanoid) brigands, also roam across the plains, either herding livestock as they go or simply taking what they can.

Not all the inhabitants of County Camden are nomads, however. More settled races are scattered throughout the county in isolated villages and hamlets. Some of these are self-sufficient communes which want little to do with the more urbanized world around them, while others survive by specializing in some form of agriculture which is sent to Manchuko or Eschenbach. Several Hobling Shires in County Camden are very friendly to outsiders, and serve pies made with fresh Dates, Lemons, Pomegranates, and other warm-weather fruit.

Manchuko

Manchuko is known as 'The Other Drae City'. In many ways it is a unique representation of Drae culture, while integrating many aspects from other cultures in an accepting and mutually beneficial manner. Entirely located above ground, Manchuko is an anomaly for many Drae. Despite their dislike of the light, the Drae of Manchuko realize the necessity of working with other races in a setting that is more accepted, and thus better for business. As a result of being in the light more often and dealing more directly with other races, the Drae of Manchuko are often seen as more accepting and less traditional than those of Ryu-chen.

While the ancient Drae traditions of stonemasonry are still prevalent in many of the buildings in Manchuko, the inhabitants' expertise in carpentry is no less visible. Despite having rarely worked with wood while residing in Ryu-chen, once the clans moved to Manchuko, many Drae artisans took up the challenge of working with the new medium, and swiftly excelled. Some were even invited to assist with renovations to the Royal Palace in Haylem City shortly after Unification.

The town and its culture, as they exist today, took shape when the Yurimaru and Kirin clans decided to free themselves from the influence of the other Houses and relocate out of Ryu Chen. Over the next hundred years the city became significantly more prominent in the region. However, the higher altitude, separation from other areas of Drae culture, and openness of the city have allowed it to develop its own culture over time.

Located in the heart of the Iron Spine Mountains, Manchuko has a humid continental climate. It features four distinct seasons with a wide range of temperature between the summer and

winter, in stark contrast to that of Ryu Chen. The city lies on a plateau and sprawls. While there are numerous pastures and fields available on the surrounding plateaus, the agriculture of Manchuko is highly specialized as a result of the soil being too acidic for most staple crops. Mount Allimar, a dormant volcano is located just West of Manchuko, is the likely cause of the mildly acidic soil in the region. As a result of this, Radishes, Blueberries, Mountain Yams, and Rhubarb grow readily here, and there is a blossoming market for Orchids and Hydrangeas, which flourish in the area. Herds of sheep are abundant in the region since there is a large amount of pastureland available, with few crops to grow in it.

The central square of Manchuko is known as The Serenity Gardens, and is home to two of the original homes of the first settlers in the region which have been preserved as a cultural site. The Gardens are also home to a daily marketplace, flower garden and a reflecting pool.

In terms of trade, Manchuko is known for its carpentry, lacquerware, pottery, and paper making. Little to no mining is done in the area, although people have been known to pan the local rivers for gold and other minerals. The forests in the north of the region provide materials for woodworking and in the rivers in the many fisherman practice cormorant fishing.

One tradition that has emerged from the region is that of the Sarutapi. The Sarutapi is a small carved wooden token, which is believed to bring the bearer luck and good health. The charms are hand carved from a local Cyprus tree (which grow abundantly in the Iron Spine Mountains), and bear the image of a mountain on one side, and the individual's name on the other.

Eschenbach ~ Capital of the county of Camden

Eschenbach is best described as a work in progress. While it is the capital of Camden and a major economic centre, the city has been under a perpetual state of construction since it was founded. It was originally built on a collection of four hills, but has since spread out to seven other surrounding hills, which creates a confusing, almost maze-like structure to the city. This coupled with the constant construction has resulted in Eschenbach being known as the City with a Thousand Faces.

Although the city seems disorderly and poorly managed, appearances can be deceiving. Much of the construction and revitalization of Eschenbach is designed to create jobs and keep the economy of the city moving, as well as keep it in constant repair from erosion caused by both the winds from the sea to the South, and the harsh desert winds from the West. Much of the city is made from a mixture of clay tiled buildings and wooded structures, with only the most prominent, permanent buildings made from stone. Yurts are common throughout Eschenbach, and the majority of the Ogrim population of the city have settled on the outskirts in a Yurt community, which rings the Northern end.

An unfortunate side effect of the constant construction of the city is the creation of slums. While major portions of the city are being constantly rebuilt, some areas simply cannot afford to maintain the upkeep of such extravagances and fall into disrepair. Two areas that all visitors should avoid are known to locals as Black Street and Scavvy Town.

Despite these less prosperous areas, Eschenbech as a whole is an economic powerhouse as well as a political and cultural oasis in the Southern portion of Taleria. Since its earliest conception, several 'fixed' areas of the city have existed. These are The Market, The Stairs, The Fields, and The Lookout. The Market refers to a sunken portion of the city, cut about ten feet into the ground, which has been paved with stone tiles. This area has been used as a market for goods since the first days of the city, and all renovations to the city's layout have taken it into consideration, so that access to The Market is unimpeded by new construction. The Stairs are not stairs as most people know them, but rather an elevated platform in the courtyard outside the Count's official residence. They are used for all official postings and announcements, as well as public executions. A large gong sits in front of The Stairs, and is sounded to notify residents that a new notice to the public has been posted. Everyone knows where The Stairs are and knows that if the gong sounds, they should make their way to The Stairs at their earliest opportunity. The Fields are a vast open area to the North of the city, beyond the Ogrim encampments, and are for military training in times of necessity. The Lookout lies to the South of Eschenbach, and is a stone tower overlooking the Southern Sea. The Lookout has a constant guard and a permanent Celestial Circle, and serves as a constant guardian over the waters to the South.

Several theatres, stages and auditoriums litter the various districts of Eschenbach, and the arts have a particular significance to the people of Eschenbach.

Just to the West of the city proper a moderately sized smelting operation exists, buried under a large hill. Metal ore is refined from raw state into ingots and shipped throughout the Kingdom. Coal is brought in from the Iron Spine Mountains, and is both burned at the smelter and exported to other Counties.

Building supplies, including clay tiles, are of key concern to the economy of Eschenbach, while there is a heavy reliance on the importing of perishable food stuffs due to the harsh climate. Eschenbach serves as a central trading location for many of the smaller communities in the South of County Camden, and in many cases is the only connection to the 'civilized' world. Eschenbach is reliant on the remote farming and mining communities in the South of Taleria for its survival, and they are in turn reliant on Eschenbach for protection and for delivering. Eschenbach is benefiting greatly from a growth in trade with Treshelling and the port area of the city is being quickly expanded.

