

Illyr - Setting

Illyr is a tiered, fortified, mountain city, steeped in spirituality and magic. The original builders of the city now called Illyr are unknown. The ancient, if well-preserved ruins were brought back to life in the second age, year 995, by an order of paladins in service to the Goddess Lyfaye. The paladins no longer govern, dedicated as they are to their spiritual pursuits, but they do serve as an advisory body to the rulers. The codes and structure of the knightly order in their self-sufficient stronghold and receptiveness to other cultures quickly drew the outsiders of other realms to their walls. Those founding codes have continued to be central to the mission and government of Illyr and its demesnes. Consequently, Illyr's population has rapidly expanded to include a host of non-warriors who loyally support the city and her knightly order.

Physical Setting

Geography

Illyr rises from a two-tiered, granite plateau nestled on the eastern flanks of the Sentinel Peaks. Her walls look out over the Black Forest and fertile Ashalann Valley. Numerous springs cascade from the sheer walls of the plateau and feed a moat in a mostly-natural ravine before flowing east as the Ashalann River.

Illyr is accessible by three routes. The Sentinel Highway runs north-south along the mountain range under the watchful eyes of two small sentry towers set high on rocky outcrops, Wyvern's Rake to the north and Hawkspur to the south. The River Road approaches from the east, following the Ashalann River upstream and skirting the edge of the Black Forest. A steep, narrow track named the Dimming Pass descends out of the mountains to the west and joins up with the Sentinel Road just south of the city.

Climate

The climate is generally temperate, though the depth of winter can be hard, and snows often completely close the Dimming Pass.

Community

Illyr is a roughly semicircular city that seems to grow from the mountains. Close study reveals that the plateaus and some of the older structures have been carved out of the vary-hued granite. Newer ones are mortar or block construction. In some places, wood has been introduced, but it is always blended artfully with the stone.

The main entrance to the city is the Dawn Arch, a long span of carved stone that stretches across the eastern ravine from the Lower City. It is the lowest point of the lower plateau, rising approximately thirty feet above surrounding land. The plateau slopes gently back to the west so that its northern and southern wings are at least eighty feet above the valley floor. To the north and south, ramps and arched bridges wind over small

cataracts and up the plateau face to enter the Lower City at either Southbridge or Northbridge, also referred to as The Roar because of its howling north winds.

The plateau of the Upper City rises another forty feet above the west side of the Lower City. The main access is Lion's Gate, a portal that opens onto a broad tunnel known as Maiden's Rite, which slopes up through the plateau to the Upper City.

Two main roads run through Illyr. The Flame Road runs from the Dawn Arch to the citadel, changing from a buff pink granite at the eastern end to brilliant white at the citadel. The Smoke Road is a grey stone loop through both the Upper and Lower Cities, winding up narrow paths and steps on the face of the upper plateau to two smaller gates, Lion's Tooth in Northbridge and Lion's Claw in Southbridge. The points where the two roads cross form the main squares on each plateau.

Lower City

The Lower City is the city proper. It is home to the general populace, markets, artisans, and various houses of worship. Lower City Landmarks include:

Taraneb Caravanserai: Located on the main square, the caravanserai is a large, colorful, two-story, square building with an open, central courtyard that provides accommodations and services for merchants, their servants, animals, and merchandise and includes an elaborate bath. The courtyard and front are lined with shops and food vendors. Travelers are also welcome if space is available.

Northbridge Quarter: The dwarves of Northbridge have crafted masterworks of architecture from the stone and expanded the northern quarter beneath the mountains through sculpted tunnels that look like streetscapes into subterranean halls that rival anything on the surface for beauty.

Southbridge Quarter: The elves of Southbridge have created breathtaking gardens, coaxing life from the stone around them and weaving it into structure of the southern quarter.

Upper City

Craftsmen of greater skill can be found in the Upper City, partially because, in times of war, the city defenders want the most skilled craftsmen in the most secured area. The Upper City also houses city officials, some merchants, most guild headquarters, two physicians, an academy, and a bank.

Upper City landmarks include:

Knightfast: The eastern end of the Upper City is dominated by Knightfast, a castle built atop the center of east edge of the plateau with thick walls, known as the Mane, spreading out to either side along the ridge. The massive stone blocks of Knightfast are almost black, shot through with occasional white streaks that give the appearance of lightning, while the Mane is a tawny-golden granite. The whole is polished so that it gleams in the faintest light. Knightfast is home to the Knight Marshal of Illyr and the Illyrian Knights.

The Sunspear/Citadel of the Sun. At the west end of the Upper City, steps lead up another twenty feet to a third, smaller plateau and the Sunspear (also called the Citadel of the Sun). The Sunspear is a spired citadel carved out of a vein of gold-bearing, brilliant white granite. To either side, lower wings are carved into the surrounding, grey to pinkish-amber rock of the curved cliff walls. The Sunspear is the residence of the Seele of Illyr and a center for the representatives of spirituality and magic in Illyr. Inside the citadel is the Shadow Gate, an elaborately carved stone portal that opens into a series of passages and chambers beneath the Sentinel Peaks.

Cultural Setting

Races

Illyr has a permanent population of approximately 15,000—primarily humans and mixed races, though enough full bloods are present that some have established their own quarters in order to shape some space in a way that honors their cultures.

Government

Illyr is governed by a duarchy and a council. The duarchy consists of the knight marshal and the seele. The knight marshal is more martially oriented, the seele more magically/spiritually oriented. One is always male, the other female, and they often become joined... wedded, as their disciplines must be. The current couple, Knight Marshal Kirian Brynn (a human male) and Seele Galshiele Eysildaana (an elven female) maintain quarters in both the citadel and Knightfast.

The Illyrian Council is made up of representatives from various segments of the population (including guilds and races). The council advises the duarchy and handles many day-to-day issues that arise. If the duarchy is split on an issue, the council rules, but a united duarchy always overrules the council.

Religion

Illyr is spiritually strong and religiously diverse. Each religion maintains its own order, tenets, and hierarchy. All, however, are overseen by the Klerikos Council, which comprises members of the various religious and magical orders recognized in Illyr. The council makes decisions on broad precepts governing all orders and determines if a new religion receives a seat on the council. Issues regarding magic typically fall under the purview of the Klerikos Council because of Illyr's position that magic is tied to the spirit. The council is based in the Sunspear and is headed by the seele. Council members are given a white and gold baldric.

Magic

Illyr is considered to be steeped in magic, but it is still something special, not easily accessed, and not taken for granted. Casual use engenders distrust. Magic is not commonly visible and yet it is believed to be woven into the fabric of life. Most of Illyr views magic as something spiritual, and perceptions of it can parallel religious views.

Military

The city is defended by the Illyrian Knights, who are based out of Knightfast:

Order of the Rock (aka Order of the Shield): Non-vested armsmen who seek entry into the Order of the Wind. They assist the city militia and serve as defenders. They do not leave the city except on granted leave. Their colors are black with a gold kite shield on the left breast.

Knights of the Order of the Wind (aka Order of the Lance): The order of full knighthood in which military discipline is viewed as a path to personal enlightenment. Their colors are a white and gold bend (diagonal band) on a black field.

Knights of the Order of the Flame: An order of less than a dozen paladins with dual spiritual and military disciplines. They come from different backgrounds but unite in one vision. One of their number sits on the Klerikos Council. As a body, they also compose the Council of Flame, which advises the knight marshal and seele but has no governmental power. Paladins choose their own colors and blazon. They maintain spartan quarters in the citadel.

History and Myth

City Origin: The origins of the city and its original name are not known. Some of the stonework throughout the city as well as in the tunnels of the Undercity suggest dwarven work. The citadel itself has an elven feel. Some people believe Illyr was the capitol of a great fae empire and the magic present in the city is only a remnant of past power. Some say that the seele is somehow integral to the essence of the city and the knight marshal, in protecting her, protects the city.

The peace that exists amongst the diverse people of the city was not easily won. In the beginning, racial and religious tensions were a never-ending struggle that threatened to turn the lines between city quarters into battlefronts. The current peace is attributed by some to skilled politics and by others to magic.

Black Forest: The Black Forest is rumored to be a place of power that does not always appreciate intrusion. It's rumored that the Ashalann river keeps the forest at bay. What exactly is kept at bay and how varies from story to story.

Sentinel Mountains: The mountains are perceived to be a place of mysticism and danger (both natural and supernatural), little better than the Black Forest, and the Dimming Pass is not for the faint of heart.

Maiden's Rite: Many legends surround the Maiden's Rite tunnel beneath Knightfast. Some have to do with the belief that the Upper City cannot be breached; others speak of the beginning of a spiritual journey that ends at the Shadow Gate; still others consider (more quietly) the means of becoming seele.

Sunspear and Undercity: Stories abound about the citadel and the Undercity... the Shadow Gate leads to the otherworld, which is variably defined as the realm of the dead, a spirit realm, or another world altogether... the Undercity is a vast, underground city that completes the semicircle of Illyr... the Undercity completes Illyr, but in another realm... the Shadow Gate leads either to the Undercity or the Otherworld depending on

whether the user knows the secret of passing through and a hint lies in the Maiden's Rite... the citadel is haunted by the spirits of the original inhabitants or by demons that drove them out; Knightfast keeps the spirits confined to their mountain home.

Knights of the Flame: Some tales suggest the paladins can walk the ways of the spirits via the citadel; hence they have earned the names Ghost Knights and Shadow Knights. Successful passage of the Shadow Gate is believed to be a paladin test.

Duchene: The Duchene are ethereal fae or spirit beings believed to inhabit the Black Forest and mountains and occasionally visit the city. They are lithe and fair with piercing, pale blue or green eyes. They are territorial, proud, and easily offended. Both unexpected aid and vengeful harm have been attributed to them. Rumors have them visiting the Sunspire or Undercity. Some suggest the Duchene were the original builders of Illyr. A parallel story references dark, openly malevolent spirits, known as the Lilin, who are the enemy of the Duchene. Many believe it's all stories to keep people out of places they shouldn't be.

Customs

Many of the cultures in Illyr have their own customs; however, the city holds festivals at high-summer and mid-winter. The festivities often spread between the main squares in the Upper and Lower Cities.

Prejudices

Despite Illyr's diversity, her struggle to achieve peace has resulted in less acceptance of outsiders than one might think. Though trade and travelers are welcome, caution is levied toward anything and anyone that might be too firmly rooted in a particular perspective... magic wielders and religious personages are watched closely until they are accepted by the Klerikos Council... half-bloods and pure races of Illyr are leery of pure races from other lands, etc.