

# DnD: Mountain City

## INTRO

As you journey towards Skystone Hold, you find yourself ascending a steep, winding path carved into the side of a mountain. The air grows thinner and crisper with each step, carrying with it a biting chill that seeps into your bones. The scent of pine trees and cold, clean stone fills your lungs, a stark contrast to the earthy smells of the lowlands.

The path is treacherous, with sheer drops on one side and towering cliffs on the other. Snow-capped peaks loom overhead, their jagged edges cutting into a sky that shifts between a deep, cloudless blue and a stormy gray. The wind whistles through narrow passes, sometimes howling with the force of a gale, other times whispering like a distant voice.

As you climb higher, the landscape becomes increasingly rugged. Massive boulders and rocky outcrops dominate the terrain, interspersed with hardy, twisted pines and patches of stubborn snow. The temperature drops noticeably, and your breath becomes visible in the cold air, puffing out in white clouds. Despite the chill, you might also notice a faint scent of smoke, tinged with the metallic odor of worked iron, hinting at the city's proximity.

Finally, Skystone Hold comes into view, emerging from the mountain itself as if it were a natural extension of the stone. The first thing you see is the Ironclad Gates, massive and imposing, flanked by towering statues of ancient warriors carved directly into the mountainside. The gates are a formidable sight, built to withstand both the elements and any potential invaders. Their iron surface is etched with runes that glint in the pale light, giving off an aura of ancient power.

Beyond the gates, the city sprawls out across multiple terraces, each one higher than the last, connected by steep staircases and narrow bridges. The buildings are hewn from the mountain's granite, their walls thick and sturdy, with sloped roofs designed to shed snow and ice. Tall, narrow windows allow in the thin mountain light, casting long shadows across the stone streets. The architecture is both functional and beautiful, with intricate carvings of mountain creatures, legendary heroes, and ancient symbols adorning the walls.

The city's layout is designed to blend seamlessly with the natural landscape. Waterfalls cascade down from the higher peaks, their icy waters channeled through aqueducts to provide fresh water to the city below. The sound of rushing water is a constant companion, mingling with the distant clanging of hammers on anvils from the Forge District. The air here is filled with the sharp, invigorating scent of burning coal, mixed with the earthy aroma of fresh stone and the occasional waft of food cooking over open fires.

As you move through the streets of Skystone Hold, you feel the solid, unyielding stone beneath your feet, a stark contrast to the shifting path you traveled to reach the city. The people you pass are hardy and resilient, their clothing thick and practical, designed to protect against the cold. Their faces are often weathered, but their eyes are sharp, reflecting the determination required to live in such a harsh environment.

Above them, the Skyward Spires rise into the clouds, their tops often obscured by mist or snow. The spires are connected by delicate bridges and winding stairways that seem impossibly narrow, giving the impression that they might collapse under the weight of a heavy snowfall, though they are as sturdy as the rest of the city. The highest spire, the Aetherial Tower, gleams faintly in the sunlight, a beacon of knowledge and magic.

For you, Skystone Hold feels like a city forged by the mountain itself—a place of strength, resilience, and quiet majesty. It is a city where every stone tells a story, where the mountain's power is both harnessed and revered, and where the challenges of the environment have shaped a culture of skill, honor, and determination.

Welcome to Skystone Hold.

Hello everyone, welcome back to the podcast! I've been in the middle of designing some cities for my own campaign that I'm running, so I've been kind of bitten by the city-building bug! I wanted to do a mountain themed city this time. I wanted to really lean into the tropes associated with dwarves BUT still keep a lot of the city outside of the mountain. It's best to kind of imagine this city as a huge one that weaves in and out of its native mountains seamlessly and when necessary.

Skystone Hold has 6 districts and each of those districts have 2 places of interest. In these places of interest we pretty much answer all of the questions you need to ask yourself when making your own city.

Those questions are:

Who governs this place?

What races live here?

What kind of resources does the city have and where do they get them?

Where do the people here gather?

What underworld activities occur here and where?

What are the dominant religions or religions in this city?

And last but not least, what kind of defenses does the city have for itself?

So without further adieu, let's talk about Skystone Hold and its districts.

# CITY DESIGN

## City Name: Skystone Hold

If you don't want to introduce the city with a big spiel like I did for the start of the episode then your blurb may look a little something like:

**Summary** (The blurb that you'd keep as a shorthand behind the screen)

Perched high in the rugged peaks of a vast mountain range, Skystone Hold is a city carved from the very heart of the mountains. The city's architecture is a blend of stone fortifications, towering spires, and intricate carvings that reflect the mountain's raw power and beauty. Skystone Hold is a stronghold of both trade and defense, renowned for its hardy inhabitants, expert craftsmen, and strategic location.

It is considered a large city with a population of approximately 12,001 - 25,000 individuals. For Skystone Hold I'd lean closer to the upper end of the scale.

The city is made up of 6 distinct districts: The Ironclad Gates, The Stoneheart District, The Skyward Spires, The Cavern Market, and the Residential District. I can't forget the Forge District either.

I've compared my style of city designing to be similar to that of Cyberpunk. What I mean by that is that we have zones with specific flavors and purposes and each of those zones contains points of interest. The case is still the same here, all I'm doing is providing the puzzle pieces that make up a city. Some of those pieces naturally fit better together than others, but they'll all work together to make up the city of Skystone Hold.

## Key Districts

### The Ironclad Gates

**Description:** The main entrance to Skystone Hold, this massive gate is carved directly into the mountainside and flanked by towering statues of ancient warriors. The Ironclad Gates are both a defensive structure and a symbol of the city's strength. Skystone Hold is a city built up on multiple massive terraces that vary in height. The Ironclad Gates are on the lowest terrace that Skystone Hold has to offer.

### **Points of Interest:**

**The Sentinel's Vigil:** A fortress-like structure where the city's guards watch over the valley below. From here, they can spot approaching armies or traders long before they arrive. I imagine the vigil to actually be outside of the Ironclad gates, and has a permanent guard duty stationed there that rotates out once their shift is complete. It's basically an outpost and the first line of defense.

**The Anvil Hall:** A grand hall just beyond the gates where visitors are greeted and vetted before being allowed further into the city. The hall is adorned with tapestries depicting the city's history. While The Sentinel's Vigil does a cursory check on visitors to turn away obvious troublemakers, The Anvil Hall is the more thorough part of the process. The physical checking of cargo being brought in against the ledgers and manifests declaring what they're bringing into the city. The Anvil Hall may also be a place where they conduct brief interviews of the potential visitors attempting to enter the city.

## The Stoneheart District

**Description:** The heart of Skystone Hold, this district is home to the city's elite, including nobles, master craftsmen, and military leaders. The buildings are constructed from the finest stone, with intricate carvings and statues adorning every corner.

### **Points of Interest:**

**The Granite Palace:** The ruling seat of Skystone Hold, this imposing structure is built from polished granite and features towering spires that pierce the sky. The palace is home to the Mountain King and his council. This area is pretty straight forward, all the decision makers in the city neatly put into 1 big building.

**The Crystal Chamber:** A hidden chamber deep within the mountain where the city's most valuable treasures and relics are kept. It is said that the chamber is protected by ancient magic. This is the Mountain King's personal treasury. Should your party decide to help him, this will most likely be the place he'll get your rewards from.

## The Forge District

**Description:** The industrial heart of the city, the Forge District is a cacophony of hammering metal, roaring furnaces, and the hiss of steam. Skilled blacksmiths, stonemasons, and artisans ply their trades here, producing the finest weapons, armor, and stonework in the land.

### **Points of Interest:**

**The Ember Forge:** The largest forge in the city, where master blacksmiths work tirelessly to create weapons and armor of unparalleled quality. The forge is powered by the heat of a natural volcanic vent. All of the smiths in the city use the Ember Forge as a sort of massive communal forge. Because of that, most of the blacksmiths have set up their shops near the Ember Forge...it is uncommon for a smith to have their own shop and private forge outside of the Forge District. If your players need a smith for whatever reason, this is the most likely area to find them.

**The Stonecutters' Guild:** A massive workshop where stonemasons carve intricate statues, reliefs, and architectural elements from the mountain's granite. One of the city's largest exports are the stone statues it is able to produce OR the master masons that produce them. It isn't uncommon for the rich and wealthy of the world to send requests to the Stonecutter's Guild - asking to contract one of its skilled stonemasons.

## The Skyward Spires

**Description:** This district is built into the highest peaks of the city, with buildings that seem to defy gravity as they cling to the mountainside or rise on narrow, winding paths. The Skyward Spires are home to scholars, wizards, and those who seek to be closer to the heavens.

### Points of Interest:

**The Aetherial Tower:** A towering spire that reaches above the clouds, home to the city's most powerful wizards and their arcane studies. The tower is a beacon of light during the night, visible for miles. Travelers know to look for this guiding light in the mountains, should they be lost in the area. This is also the most likely place for any scholarly player in the party to visit.

**The Star Observatory:** A circular building with a domed roof that opens to reveal the night sky. Scholars and astronomers gather here to study the stars and chart the heavens. This is just a cool point of interest that really kind of ties into the Wizard tower vibe of the Skyward Spires as a whole.

## The Cavern Market

**Description:** A sprawling market located within a massive cavern beneath the city. The Cavern Market is the hub of trade in Skystone Hold, where merchants from all over the mountains come to sell their goods.

### **Points of Interest:**

**The Glittering Vein:** A legendary part of the market where rare gems, precious metals, and enchanted items are sold. The stalls here are draped with silks and lit by glowing crystals. This area is actually the original mine that led to this place being settled and built up. This is the market to find pretty much everything your party may need in the city.

**The Deep Well:** A natural spring at the center of the market, said to have mystical properties. The water is believed to grant strength and vitality to those who drink from it.

## Residential District - Stonehearth Ward

**Description:** The people of Skystone Hold primarily reside in a district known as Stonehearth Ward. This district is a bustling, vibrant area nestled within one of the lower terraces of the city, where the warmth of community and the comforts of home contrast with the harsh, cold environment outside.

### **Points of Interest:**

**The Warmstone Inn:** A popular gathering spot for residents and travelers alike, the Warmstone Inn is known for its hearty meals, warm hearths, and strong spirits. The inn's stone walls are lined with trophies from hunts and adventures, making it a hub of stories and camaraderie. So now we have an inn for our players to stay at.

**Hearthstone Plaza:** The central square of Stonehearth Ward, where markets are held, and residents gather for festivals and events. A large, communal fire pit in the middle of the plaza is kept burning year-round, symbolizing the warmth and unity of the community.

I'll even give a bonus point of interest in this residential district, WHATTTTT?!

**The Everwarm Bathhouse:** An underground bathhouse fed by hot springs, the Everwarm Bathhouse is a place where residents can relax and unwind. The warm, mineral-rich waters are said to have healing properties, making this a cherished spot within the district.

The city is built up on massive terraces so you can easily just add a new terrace containing whatever you need it to contain and it should fit in just fine.

The thing to keep in mind when putting these districts together is that 3 of them have relatively fixed locations. The Ironclad Gates are base level, the Cavern Market is underground beneath the interior of the Ironclad Gates, and The Skyward Spires need to be the highest terrace in the city. All the others after those 3 are completely up to you in where you decide to put them.

Now that we have the rough outline of a city and the districts it encompasses, let's talk about the guards who protect it all.

## The Ironclads

The Ironclads are the elite guards of Skystone Hold, known for their unwavering loyalty and formidable combat skills. They serve as both protectors of the city and enforcers of its laws, patrolling the streets, guarding the gates, and defending against any threats that arise from the mountains or beyond. The Ironclads are revered by the citizens of Skystone Hold for their dedication and courage, and they are often seen as symbols of the city's strength.

### Emblem

The emblem of the Ironclads is a shield-shaped crest featuring a stylized mountain peak with a hammer crossed with a sword in front of it. The peak represents the unyielding strength of the mountain, the hammer symbolizes craftsmanship and the city's industrious spirit, and the sword stands for the Ironclads' role as protectors. The emblem is often rendered in silver against a dark blue background, the colors of Skystone Hold.

### Uniform and Gear

The TLDR for this section will just be the mechanical advantages and items these guards have. They're equipped with plate and chainmail armor, and they have boots that allow them to ignore any penalties from rough terrain involving the mountain, ice, or snowy environments.

As far as weapons are concerned, they're also issued war hammers, battle axes, short swords, small round shields, and sometimes heavy crossbows. If the TLDR satisfied you, then feel free to skip ahead to the Ranks In The Ironclads section of the episode.

The Ironclads' uniform is one that embodies practicality and provides a strong sense of unity among the guard. Their gear list is as follows:

**Helmet:** The Ironclads wear distinctive helms forged from dark steel, with a visor that can be lifted or lowered. The helm is adorned with the emblem of the Ironclads on the forehead and features protective cheek guards. The design of the helmet allows for excellent visibility while offering substantial protection in combat.

**Armor:** Their armor is a combination of plate and chainmail, designed to be both protective and functional in the rugged mountain terrain. The chestplate, greaves, and bracers are made from the same dark steel as their helmets, polished to a dull sheen. The chestplate is engraved with

the Ironclad emblem, and the armor is lined with fur to provide warmth against the cold mountain air.

**Cloak:** Each Ironclad wears a heavy cloak made of thick, dark blue wool, fastened with a silver clasp in the shape of the Ironclad emblem. The cloak is both practical and symbolic, providing warmth in the cold mountain climate and serving as a mark of their status as guardians of Skystone Hold.

**Boots:** Their boots are made from tough leather, reinforced with steel at the toes and heels. The soles are studded with metal spikes to provide grip on icy or rocky surfaces, allowing the Ironclads to move swiftly and securely across the city's treacherous terrain.

**Gorget:** A reinforced metal collar to protect the neck. Issued to those sent on patrol duty outside of the city walls.

**Gloves:** Thick leather gloves with steel plating on the knuckles for additional protection and to allow for both combat and the handling of harsh mountain tools.

**Belt:** A wide leather belt with various pouches for carrying essential supplies, such as rations, climbing tools, and first aid items.

## Weaponry

**Primary Weapon:** The Ironclads typically carry long-handled war hammers or battle axes, both of which are ideal for dealing with heavily armored foes or creatures with tough hides. The heads of these weapons are often engraved with runes of strength and protection.

**Secondary Weapon:** Each Ironclad also carries a short sword for close combat and a small, round shield emblazoned with the Ironclad emblem.

**Ranged Weapon:** Some Ironclads are equipped with crossbows, used to defend the city's high walls and towers. These crossbows are sturdy and reliable, with bolts designed to pierce armor or large, mountainous creatures.

## Roles and Duties

The Ironclads are responsible for maintaining order within Skystone Hold. They protect its borders, and lead military campaigns when necessary. They mainly patrol the Ironclad Gates, ensuring that no unauthorized person enters the city, and they guard important locations like the Granite Palace and the Aetherial Tower. When trouble does pop up, the Ironclads are the first line of defense, known for their disciplined formations and unbreakable morale.

The Ironclads are more than just guards; they are a symbol of the indomitable spirit of Skystone Hold, representing the city's strength, resilience, and unwavering commitment to its people.



Now let's talk about the hierarchy and rank structure that makes up the Ironclads.

## Ranks in The Ironclads

The TLDR is that there are 7 ranks in the Ironclad guard. Recruits, Sentinels, Sergeants, Lieutenants, Captains, the Commander, and the High Commander. If that's enough of a springboard to satisfy your needs then feel free to skip ahead to the Culture & Society sections of the episode.

The Ironclads of Skystone Hold have a structured hierarchy, with each rank reflecting a member's experience, skill, and leadership abilities. Promotion within the ranks is based on merit, combat prowess, and loyalty to Skystone Hold. A quick way to see an Ironclads' rank is to look at their insignia.

### 1. Ironclad Recruit

**Description:** The initial rank for new members who have completed basic training and been accepted into the Ironclads. Recruits are often assigned to less critical duties, such as patrolling the outer edges of the city or assisting higher-ranking Ironclads.

**Responsibilities:** Guard duty, basic patrols, and supporting roles in larger operations.

**Insignia:** A simple iron clasp on their cloak, shaped like a mountain peak.

### 2. Ironclad Sentinel

**Description:** After recruits have proven themselves in the field, they're promoted to Sentinel. Sentinels are the backbone of the Ironclads, responsible for daily patrols, manning key defensive positions, and maintaining order within the city.

**Responsibilities:** Regular patrols, gatekeeping, and defense of critical areas within Skystone Hold.

**Insignia:** A silver clasp on their cloak, featuring the mountain peak with a crossed sword and hammer.

### 3. Ironclad Sergeant

**Description:** Sergeants are experienced warriors who have demonstrated leadership qualities. They command small squads of Sentinels and are often tasked with overseeing patrol routes, training new recruits, and leading missions outside the city.

**Responsibilities:** Squad leadership, tactical oversight, and training of lower ranks.

**Insignia:** A silver clasp with the Ironclad emblem inlaid with a small gemstone, typically a piece of polished granite, symbolizing their elevated status.

#### 4. Ironclad Lieutenant

**Description:** Lieutenants are seasoned veterans who have shown exceptional skill in both combat and command. They manage multiple squads, coordinate larger operations, and serve as advisors to higher-ranking officers. Lieutenants often oversee the defense of specific districts within Skystone Hold.

**Responsibilities:** Command of multiple squads, strategic planning, and district defense.

**Insignia:** A silver clasp with the Ironclad emblem surrounded by intricate engravings, denoting their high rank and authority.

#### 5. Ironclad Captain

**Description:** Captains are among the highest-ranking officers within the Ironclads. They command entire divisions, lead major military operations, and report directly to the Ironclad Commander. Captains are often responsible for the defense of critical locations like the Ironclad Gates or the Granite Palace.

**Responsibilities:** Division command, leadership in large-scale battles, and strategic decision-making.

**Insignia:** A gold clasp with the Ironclad emblem, set with a larger, more prominent gemstone, typically a piece of clear quartz, symbolizing clarity of vision and leadership.

#### 6. Ironclad Commander

**Description:** The Ironclad Commander is the highest rank, overseeing all Ironclads and responsible for the defense and security of Skystone Hold. The Commander is a master strategist, often consulting with the Mountain King and other leaders to ensure the city's safety. The Commander's word is law within the Ironclads.

**Responsibilities:** Overall command of the Ironclads, strategic oversight of the city's defense, and direct counsel to the Mountain King.

**Insignia:** A gold clasp with the Ironclad emblem, adorned with a flawless piece of obsidian, representing the unbreakable strength and resolve of the Commander.

## 7. Ironclad High Commander

**Description:** A ceremonial title, often given to a retired Commander who has served with exceptional distinction. The High Commander serves as an advisor and symbol of the Ironclads' legacy, but they no longer hold direct command over troops.

**Responsibilities:** Advisory role, ceremonial duties, and upholding the traditions of the Ironclads.

**Insignia:** A platinum clasp with the Ironclad emblem, encrusted with multiple gemstones, symbolizing a lifetime of service and honor.

The Ironclads' rank structure ensures a clear chain of command, with each rank bearing increased responsibilities and the respect that comes with it. This hierarchy allows the Ironclads to operate efficiently and effectively in times of peace and war, maintaining the safety and stability of Skystone Hold.

A quick way to implement the ironclads into your game is to think of them as clusters of 10 up to a certain point. At the top of the totem pole is the Commander, with the High Commander being a weird ceremonial but still very high ranking position. Beneath the Commander are Captain and Lieutenant duos that oversee each individual district. Those lieutenants are over 10 sergeants who each command 10 sentinels, and each of those sentinels command 10 recruits. So if we add in the High Commander and King to their numbers then that brings us to a nice and tidy 1,275 guards that walk the streets of Skystone Hold, a pretty respectable number.

## CULTURE AND SOCIETY

**Who Lives Here?:** The people of Skystone Hold are a proud and resilient folk, accustomed to the harsh conditions of mountain life. Dwarves, humans, and goliaths make up the majority of the population, each contributing their unique skills to the city's prosperity.

**How Is Money Made?:** The city's economy is based on mining, craftsmanship, and trade. Precious metals, gems, and expertly crafted goods are the main exports, while the Cavern Market serves as a bustling center of commerce.

**What Gods Get Worshiped Here And By Who?:** The inhabitants of Skystone Hold worship deities associated with the earth, the forge, and the sky. Temples dedicated to these gods are scattered throughout the city, often built into the mountains themselves.

## DANGERS

**Avalanches:** The city is at constant risk of avalanches, especially during the winter months. The inhabitants have developed elaborate warning systems and fortified structures to protect against them.

**Giants:** The surrounding mountains are home to powerful giants who occasionally pose a threat to the city. While some giants trade with the city, others are hostile and must be dealt with carefully. Storm, Cloud, Frost, and Stone giants are the ones you're most likely to encounter in this area. You can break them up into individual tribes of their own kind or a nation of giants that simply inhabit the area near the city.

**The Deepening:** A mysterious and ever-expanding chasm that has appeared near the Forge District. It is said to be connected to the underworld, and strange creatures have been seen emerging from its depths.

These dangers mean that the encounters the players have in this area of the world can range from a Challenge Rating of less than 1, to easily over 13. So you can do a lot here and feasibly spend a lot of time in this area to level your players.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are a few quick ideas for adventures and quest lines in Skystone Hold.

**The Chasm's Secret:** The players are hired to explore the Deepening chasm and discover what lies beneath before it becomes a greater threat to Skystone Hold. Typical dungeon diving and crawling.

**The Stolen Relic:** A valuable artifact is stolen from the Crystal Chamber, and the players must track down the thieves before the artifact's power can be used against the city. The classic cat and mouse style quest except instead of being the thief, you're hunting them down.

**Rise of The Giants:** Tensions with the local giants have reached a breaking point, and the players must negotiate a peace or prepare the city for war. Finally the political quest, with a few rolls it can go from being solved peacefully with promises and contracts being made OR turn into a bloodbath that determines the fate of 2 important populations in the area.

Skystone Hold is a city of strength and majesty, a bastion of civilization in the unforgiving heights of the mountains, where danger and opportunity go hand in hand.

## CONCLUSION

I believe with this, I've given you enough of a springboard for you to take it and add your own unique spin to it. I've given a lot of broad ideas and suggestions, but nothing concrete.

Who are the unique NPCs? Who is the Mountain King? What's going on with that huge chasm that keeps growing? I have a good idea for how I'd answer those questions, but I think I'd prefer to see and hear about the ones you come up with to fit your game.

I hope you liked learning about the mountain-city of Skystone Hold. Maybe it'll even make its way into your game. If it does, feel free to shoot me an email and tell me about the twists you added to it.

That concludes this episode of the podcast. I hope you enjoyed the episode. If you enjoyed it, then like, subscribe, and share the podcast with your friends. This is Myths, History, and Dnd and I hope you tune in next time.