

Iridescent Hills

East of the Jorvund River lies a humid region less suited to animal husbandry than its western counterpart, and even further east - the Iridescent Hills. In the past, these lands were seen as a forced exile for the defeated orcs after the great battles against the men of the north. The latter, in turn, took possession of the fertile plains and considered themselves the victors, lords of the best lands. However, necessity leads to adaptation - or death - and the orcs chose to adapt.

Until then semi-nomadic, they were forced to change their way of life. The new territory pushed them to permanent settlements, and there, generation after generation, they built their new communities. Proud tribes, with a strong sense of belonging and a deep knowledge of nature, worked together to shape their own survival. What had been an exile became, in time, a stronghold of strength, growth and independence. They embraced their destiny and prospered.

1. Economy and Evolution

The orcs' adaptation was not only due to their survival in the new way of life they had adopted, but also to their economic progress. They soon discovered that the land held something even more valuable than livestock or crops: minerals. Iron and copper, abundant in the hills, became the basis of a new economy. The hard work of the tribes led to the creation of mines and forges, resulting in the production of metal bars, tools, weapons and jewelry. Trade with Brukostad became highly profitable, allowing the orcs to leave behind the poverty of their early years and, over time, even establish a favorable trade balance.

The economic transformation strengthened their society. In a few generations, the orcs of the Iridescent Hills went from being seen as refugees to becoming respected merchants and blacksmiths. Their skills in metallurgy were recognized throughout the region, and their growing wealth aroused both envy and fear among the men of the North. What began as a marginalized territory now stood as a symbol of strength, with prosperous cities and a people proud of their ability to overcome obstacles.

2. Political Structure and Laws

The society maintains its community traditions and has developed a political system based on cooperation and consensus. Inspired by ancestral customs and influenced by the new economic reality, they structured a government model that balances tradition with the need for centralized organization.

Power is exercised by the Council of Tribes, composed of chiefs from each city and community elders who make fundamental decisions about trade and defense. This council elects a Supreme Chief, a position granted to a leader of great wisdom and prestige, chosen by the vote of the council's representatives at a time of greatest need.

Orcish laws reflect a society of strong collectivity, where the common good usually trumps individualism. Some of the main legal traditions include:

- **Right to Land and Work:** No orc can be the absolute owner of the land or mines. The use of resources is determined by the council, ensuring that the

entire community benefits from extraction and trade.

- **Collective Forges:** The great forges are operated jointly by families and tribes, each contributing and receiving their share of the profits.
- **Honor and Work:** Those who refuse to contribute to society, whether in defense, extraction, smithing, or trade, are seen as unworthy. Without severe punishment, they are marginalized, and must prove their worth through service to the community.
- **Tribal Code of Justice:** Serious crimes, such as treason against the people or theft of community resources, are judged by the council. Punishment ranges from hard labor to exile, depending on the severity of the offense.
- **Protection of the Ancestors:** Ancient temples and caves are respected, and their secrets are preserved.
- **The Right of Blood:** If an orc is unjustly wronged, he or his family may demand formal compensation from the council. Minor disputes are resolved through ritual challenges, ensuring justice without the need for internal warfare.

3. Culture and Society

Collectivity is at the heart of this culture's identity, and every custom, tradition, and artistic expression reflects this spirit of unity. The local orc language derives from an ancient tribal tongue, rich in guttural sounds and deep intonations, but due to constant contact with human traders, many orcs also speak a rudimentary form of the northern language, used especially in trade. Internal dialects vary very little between tribes, while human words gradually begin to form part of their vocabulary.

Spirituality is deeply linked to respect for the spirits of the land and ancestors. Shamans play an essential role, interpreting omens and conducting rituals to balance the physical and spiritual worlds. Sacred caves serve as pilgrimage sites, where warriors and leaders seek visions before making important decisions. There is nothing better to strengthen community ties and connection with tradition than festivities, here are a few: During the Blood Oath Ceremony, young people who come of age gather to promise loyalty to the people before the Council of Tribes. Each person faces a physical challenge, makes a vow of service to the community and burns a hair or piece of leather to seal their connection with their ancestors. On Remembrance Day, families visit the graves of their ancestors, leaving offerings and telling stories of the great deeds of the past. At nightfall, the community gathers around bonfires to remember those who came before, reinforcing the continuity of the people.

In addition, the Iron Games are an annual celebration of the strength and skill of the orcs. Competitions in stone lifting, wood cutting, weapon forging and fighting honor the vigor and ingenuity of the people. The winners receive great prestige and earn the right to lead hunts, troops and commercial expeditions in the next cycle.

Their art is manifested primarily in jewelry, metal sculpture, and tribal adornments. Weapons and armor are carved with runes and patterns that tell stories. Their music is intense and percussive, with drums and ritual chants

used in celebrations and battles.

The population that inhabits Iridescent Hills is mostly orcish, but there are a significant number of half-orcs, descendants of orc-human relations. Unlike in human settlements, where they face severe prejudice, here they are accepted, but often considered "doubly displaced." Lacking the physical stature of full-blooded orcs and lacking full acceptance from both worlds, many half-orcs end up taking on intermediary roles, as small traders or even mercenaries. Some prosper, but all struggle hard to find their place.

4. Military and Defense

Defense is based on collective strength and adaptation to the terrain. Major cities, such as Druvgar, have reinforced palisades and watchtowers, with sentries on duty day and night. Outposts in the hills ensure that any hostile movement is detected before it reaches the settlements.

The military structure is decentralized but highly efficient. Each tribe maintains its own militia, made up of experienced warriors and young men in training. In times of war, these forces unite under the leadership of a commander chosen by the Tribal Council, usually a renowned warrior or a veteran chief. It is worth mentioning that they are experts in ambushes and guerrilla warfare, taking advantage of the terrain to compensate for any numerical disadvantage.

Ironically, however, the orcs have been reversing the balance of power in the valley over the past few years. With their mastery of metallurgy and the wealth generated by the trade in minerals and forged goods, the orcs now possess weapons and armor superior to those of the human forces in the region. Iron mined from the hills, once exchanged at disadvantageous conditions, now equips orc warriors with refined steel blades and robust armor, while human armies, once so superior, are beginning to feel the weight of their technological lag. Tribes that once fought with efficient, albeit primitive, weapons now boast balanced spears, reinforced bows and sharp blades, latent proof of growing prosperity.

The alliance with other peoples is unstable. The various tribes of the Hills maintain a trade pact with human cities, but mutual distrust prevents deeper cooperation. Some tribes are seeking new maritime agreements to cut their dependence on Brukostad merchants, contributing even more to the constant tensions between leaders and merchants on both sides. Internally, power struggles between great merchants and influential warriors also occur, creating political rivalries.

In addition, external threats require constant vigilance. Raiding bands from the north frequently attack caravans, and rumors suggest that some isolated orc tribes may be exploiting hidden mines without paying due tribute to the council. This raises the risk of internal conflict, especially if a tribe gains too much power without the consent of its elders.

5. External Influences and Diplomatic Relations

Iridescent Hills maintains a pragmatic relationship with the outside world. Trade with Brukostad and other human cities is essential to the orc economy, but it is also a constant source of headaches.

To the north, raiders and mercenaries pose a constant threat to overland travel, forcing the orcs to reinforce the security of these caravans. There are rumors that smaller tribes have recently tried to strengthen ties with these factions in order to gain political advantage.

It is worth noting once again that the orcs' growing technological advantage is beginning to change their position in the geopolitical scenario. Once marginalized, they now command respect both for their military power and their economic importance. However, this rise also generates fear among their neighbors, who see them as an emerging threat.

These people do not seek domination, but neither do they accept continued exploitation.

6. Legends

6.1 The Black Goat - Guardian or Troublemaker?

Deep in the almost endless hills, between valleys and rocks, roams the Black Goat - a gigantic creature, with horns twisted like oak roots and eyes that glow like embers. Some say he is the spirit of the mountain, others swear he is just a stubborn goat... only three times bigger.

For some, he is a guide, leading lost travelers back to the path. For others, a real troublemaker, stealing supplies and leaving behind a trail of chaos. Some say he once knocked down an orc chief in the middle of a speech and ate the map of an entire expedition.

Whether an ancient spirit or just a very clever goat, no one denies his presence. He may be an ally - or the reason your dinner mysteriously disappeared. And remember: never look him directly in the eye... they say it brings bad luck!

6.2 The Bottomless Pit

Between the hills, hidden by mist, lies the Bottomless Pit, a gateway to the world of the dead. The orcs say it was dug by forgotten hands and sealed by the gods, but never completely closed. They say anything thrown into it disappears forever, sucked into the domain of the hungry spirits.

6.3 The Mistbringer

A faceless entity that appears on the coldest nights, shrouded in an eerie mist. Legends say that those who gaze upon it for too long have their bodies and souls ripped away and pulled into the mist. Ancient as the forgotten gods, it is believed to have been a guardian of gates between worlds, now corrupted. Wherever it passes, silence reigns, and only footsteps remain at dawn. It cannot be defeated, only avoided.

7. Places of interest

7.1 The Silent Eye

Atop the highest mountain in the Iridescent Hills, shrouded by fierce winds and constant cold, stands The Silent Eye—a stone temple that stood long before the orcs set foot on these lands, its origins shrouded in mystery and

fear. Seen from the sky, its circular shape resembles an eye carved into the earth, ever watchful.

The few records of the temple suggest that it was built by a long-extinct civilization whose knowledge of the heavens surpassed that of the wisest shamans. As if brought from distant lands, the stones that compose it are found nowhere else in the region. Its ruins have withstood the most violent storms.

For the orcs it is a place of fear, for they fear the spirits that, according to legend, still roam among its weathered columns. On certain nights of the year, a strange light shines over the temple—a cold, yellow glow. Some believe it is a sign from the ancient inhabitants or even an attempt to communicate with the living. Others claim it is just the winds and the reflections of the moon, trying to deceive the unwary.

The elders say that, long ago, a young orc defied the warnings and climbed to the site to prove his courage. He spent an entire night among the ruins and, upon returning, he had changed. His eyes, once bright and burning, had lost their shine. He never spoke a single word again, only sat every night facing the mountain, as if he heard voices that no one else could hear and was considered a lunatic.

Since then, few have dared to venture there. Those who go and return speak of moving shadows and the uncomfortable feeling of being watched by something invisible. Perhaps the temple still fulfills its original purpose, watching over the heavens... or perhaps it has turned its attention to those who dare to disturb its silence.

7.2 Turquoise Hot Springs - The Refuge of the Orcs

Located east of Druvgar, at the base of the Zarn'Vol volcano, the Turquoise Hot Springs are one of the most revered natural treasures of the orcs of the Iridescent Hills. Their vibrant blue hot springs emerge from the warm subsoil of the dormant volcano, creating natural pools and stone reservoirs, where the temperature decreases the farther away from the source one travels. During the harsh winters, these waters become an essential refuge, attracting travelers and weary warriors in search of rest and revitalization.

Orc legends tell of the Hot Springs as a gift from the spirits of the mountain, a blessing for those who were able to harden the harshness of exile. Shamans claim that the waters have healing properties, capable of relieving pain, strengthening the body and even purifying the soul. For this reason, the site has become a center of spiritual rituals, where orcs hold ceremonies to honor their ancestors and seek guidance during difficult times. In addition to their medicinal and spiritual importance, the hot springs are a social gathering place. In winter, entire tribes gather around the stone pools to share stories, trade goods, and strengthen alliances. The warm mist rising from the waters mixes with the sparse pine vegetation, creating a scene of rare beauty, especially at sunset, when the intense colors of the sky reflect on the crystal-clear waters and the colorful hills around it.

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7.3 Land of Sighs - The Cursed Cemetery

West of Grukvik lies an ancient cemetery, a place that even the orcs dare not name aloud. The soil there is dry and infertile for even the hardiest of plants. It is said to belong to a forgotten civilization, whose dead never found their proper rest.

The air is heavy, permeated with the metallic smell of death. Those who venture here feel the energy slowly drained from their bodies. Distant whispers echo among the cracked tombstones, and ownerless shadows glide across the graves, watching, waiting. Those who stay too long feel an unbearable cold penetrate their skin, and their bones begin to weigh them down, as if something is pulling them down - until there is no life left.

It is said that the unfortunates who succumb to the power of the cemetery rise the following night, empty of life, condemned to wander eternally, protecting that cursed ground and dragging new unwary souls to their deaths.

No one knows what cursed that place, but one thing is certain: the dead there never sleep.