

Ironvale

This modest settlement was born next to the only bridge that crosses the Slimy River, in a region where few dare to put down roots. Today, its greatest gift is a spring of pure water that survived the collapse of the region, an unexpected blessing in a land where everything seems doomed. With this spring, the villagers are able to irrigate their tiny crops, making Ironvale a rare oasis amidst the devastation that plagues the region.

The name that gives the place its name came from the first workers who came to build the bridge. During a stormy night, trapped by the river swollen by the rains and the treacherous darkness of the night, they found safety in these hills. When the first light of dawn broke through the fog and touched the earth, the sight of a fertile soil protected from the inclement winds filled them with hope. "As firm and unbreakable as iron," they said, and that is how they named the place.

The village is located about 20 miles (32 km) from Dunmaris, the largest settlement south of the Slimy River. Despite their relative proximity, the journey between the two is not easy these days. The path winds through treacherous terrain and requires caution, especially after the tremors that have ravaged the region. Still, Dunmaris and Ironvale maintain a modest trade, exchanging sparse supplies and information about the horrors that grow at the headwaters of the river.

Although far from the direct influence of the Lurkers, the stories from Ravenscar and Dunmaris travel through the village on the cold wind, bringing fear and distrust. No one ignores the rumors of creatures that move in the shadows, and at night, doors and windows are locked preemptively. Many believe that it is only a matter of time before the plague that ravages the north reaches their haven.

Npcs

Old John - Old John is a man with skin as dark as wet earth, covered in wrinkles that speak louder than his words. His eyes are deep and tired, but they glow like embers in the dark. With a pipe always lit and a hand-carved staff, he sits by the Ironvale spring, telling stories that few believe, but all listen to.

He came with the first wave of workers who built the bridge over the Slimy River. While many left when the job was done, John stayed. He said that the land whispered to him, that the valley called him to stay. "Bridges connect, but they also separate," he often says. "And when bad things come, the bridge will decide who crosses and who stays."

The villagers respect him and listen to his words carefully, but always with a certain amount of fear. To some, he is just a tired old man. To others, he knows more than he should.

Draza - A woman of few words, with calloused hands and a tired look, she knows every herb, root and infusion that can alleviate the ailments that afflict one.

She has lived in Ironvale since she was a child, learning the secrets of plants from her grandmother, a healer before her. But times have changed. The winds carry dark tales, and the Slimy water whispers promises of death. Draza fears that the shadow of the Lurkers will reach her home, fears that the blight of the dead land will consume her refuge.

As a child, she heard her grandmother speak of a place among the hills, and protected by a great cave where the soil never dried, where a tree as old as time itself stretched its roots into the heart of the world. The Tree of Life, a name whispered only by those who believed in miracles. Its leaves were said to cure any illness, that its trunk held secrets no mortal should know.

But no one knew where it was—or if it even existed.

As the years passed, Draza clung to this story like a castaway to a piece of driftwood in the raging sea. Perhaps it was a fable, a dream of dying old men. But maybe... just maybe... in that doomed land, there was still an uncorrupted root.

Every night, before she goes to sleep, she asks herself: "How much time do we have left?" And, more than ever, the doubt grows within her: what if the Tree of Life is real?