

The Hidden Vale

Location · Monastery

Part of: The Drakespire Mountains

Population: ~60 monks and initiates

Government: Abbot (current: Sereveth Ironpool, Human Weohstan, Monk 14, LN, age 67)

The Hidden Vale is exactly what it sounds like: a monastery at the bottom of a valley so narrow that it receives direct sunlight for fewer than four hours each day. It sits in the foothills of the Drakespire Mountains on the western slope, far enough from the established passes that the Blue Knights' maps show the region as 'impassable terrain.' The monks' maps are more detailed.

The monastery trains exclusively in the Way of the Four Elements -- a discipline that is older than the Orders of Wizardry and has always made those Orders nervous. Elemental Disciples channel power through mastery of the physical self rather than through sanctioned arcane training, which places them in a legal grey area that the Orders have been content not to examine closely so long as the monks remain obscure. The Hidden Vale has been quietly cooperative with this arrangement for two centuries.

Its presence on the main continent rather than Kajima is the result of a disagreement, now ancient, between the Hidden Vale's founder and the monastic tradition on the island. The specifics are not discussed with outsiders. The relevant outcome is that the Hidden Vale's approach to the Way of the Four Elements is subtly different from the Kajiman interpretation -- more austere in practice, more flexible in philosophy, and with a specific emphasis on the element of earth that the island schools do not share.

Reaching the Hidden Vale requires either knowing where it is or finding someone who does. The monastery does not advertise. Prospective initiates who arrive at its door without invitation are tested before they are admitted -- and the test is not announced in advance.