

APPENDIX C: THE PLANES OF EXISTENCE

INCREDIBLY VAST IS THE COSMOS OF THE DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, which teems with a multitude of worlds as well as myriad alternate dimensions of reality, called the **planes of existence**. It encompasses every world where Dungeon Masters run their adventures, all within the relatively mundane realm of the Material Plane. Beyond that plane are domains of raw elemental matter and energy, realms of pure thought and ethos, the homes of demons and angels, and the dominions of the gods.

Many spells and magic items can draw energy from these planes, summon the creatures that dwell there, communicate with their denizens, and allow adventurers to travel there. As your character achieves greater power and higher levels, you might undertake a quest to rescue a friend from the horrific depths of the Abyss, or find yourself hoisting a tankard with the friendly giants of Ysgard. You might walk on streets made of solid fire or test your mettle on a battlefield where the fallen are resurrected with each dawn.

THE MATERIAL PLANE

The Material Plane is the nexus where the philosophical and elemental forces that define the other planes collide in the jumbled existence of mortal life and mundane matter. All the worlds of D&D exist within the Material Plane, making it the starting point for most campaigns and adventures. The rest of the multiverse is defined in relation to the Material Plane.

The worlds of the Material Plane are infinitely diverse, for they reflect the creative imagination of the DMs who set their games there, as well as the players whose heroes adventure there. They include magic-wasted desert planets and island-dotted water worlds, worlds where magic combines with advanced technology and others trapped in an endless Stone Age, worlds where the gods walk and places they have abandoned.

The best-known worlds in the multiverse are the ones that have been published as official campaign settings for the D&D game over the years—Greyhawk, Blackmoor, Dragonlance, the Forgotten Realms, Mystara, Birthright, Dark Sun, and Eberron, among others. Each of these worlds boasts its own cast of heroic adventurers and scheming villains, its own ancient ruins and forgotten artifacts, its own dungeons and its own dragons. But if your campaign takes place on one of these worlds, it belongs to your DM—you might imagine it as one of thousands of parallel versions of the world, which might diverge wildly from the published version.

MATERIAL ECHOES

The Material Plane is a richly magical place, and its magical nature is reflected in the two planes that share its central place in the multiverse. The Feywild and the Shadowfell are parallel dimensions occupying the same cosmological space, so they are often called echo planes or mirror planes to the Material Plane. The worlds and landscapes of these planes mirror the natural world of the Material Plane but reflect those features into different forms—more marvelous and magical in the Feywild, distorted and colorless in the Shadowfell. Where a volcano stands in the Material Plane, a mountain topped with skyscraper-sized crystals that glow with internal fire towers in the Feywild, and a jagged rock outcropping resembling a skull marks the spot on the Shadowfell.

The **Feywild**, also called the Plane of Faerie, is a land of soft lights and wonder, a country of little people with great desires, a place of music and death. It is a realm of eternal twilight, with slow lanterns bobbing in the gentle breeze and huge fireflies buzzing through groves and fields. The sky is alight with the faded colors of the setting, or perhaps rising, sun. But, in fact, the sun never truly sets or rises; it remains stationary, dusky and low in the sky. Away from the settled areas ruled by the Seelie Court, the land is a tangle of sharp-toothed brambles and syrupy fens—perfect territory for the Unseelie to hunt their prey. Fey creatures, such as those brought to the world by *conjure woodland beings* and similar spells, dwell in the Feywild.

The **Shadowfell**, also called the Plane of Shadow, is a darkly lighted dimension, a world of black and white where color has been leached from everything. It is a place of toxic darkness that hates the light, where the sky is a black vault with neither sun nor stars.



POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PLANES

Like a dome above the other planes, the **Positive Plane** is the source of radiant energy and the raw life force that suffuses all living beings, from the puny to the sublime. Its dark reflection is the **Negative Plane**, the source of necrotic energy that destroys the living and animates the undead.

BEYOND THE MATERIAL

Beyond the Material Plane, the various planes of existence are realms of myth and mystery. They're not simply other worlds, but different qualities of being, formed and governed by spiritual and elemental principles abstracted from the ordinary world.

PLANAR TRAVEL

When adventurers travel into other planes of existence, they are undertaking a legendary journey across the thresholds of existence to a mythic destination where they strive to complete their quest. Such a journey is the stuff of legend. Braving the realms of the dead, seeking out the celestial servants of a deity, or bargaining with an efreeti in its home city will be the subject of song and story for years to come.

Travel to the planes beyond the Material Plane can be accomplished in two ways: by casting a spell or by using a planar portal.

Spells. A number of spells allow direct or indirect access to other planes of existence. *Plane shift* and *gate* can transport adventurers directly to any other plane of existence, with different degrees of precision. *Etherealness* allows adventurers to enter the Ethereal Plane and travel from there to any of the planes it touches—the Shadowfell, the Feywild, or the Elemental Planes. And the *astral projection* spell lets adventurers project themselves into the Astral Plane and travel to the Outer Planes.

Portals. A portal is a general term for a stationary interplanar connection that links a specific location on one plane to a specific location on another. Some portals are like doorways, a clear window, or a fog-shrouded passage, and simply stepping through it effects the interplanar travel. Others are locations—circles of standing stones, soaring towers, sailing ships, or even whole towns—that exist in multiple planes at once or flicker from one plane to another in turn. Some are vortices, typically joining an Elemental Plane with a very similar location on the Material Plane, such as the heart of a volcano (leading to the Plane of Fire) or the depths of the ocean (to the Plane of Water).

TRANSITIVE PLANES

The Ethereal Plane and the Astral Plane are called the Transitive Planes. They are mostly featureless realms that serve primarily as ways to travel from one plane to another. Spells such as *etherealness* and *astral projection* allow characters to enter these planes and traverse them to reach the planes beyond.

The **Ethereal Plane** is a misty, fog-bound dimension that is sometimes described as a great ocean. Its shores, called the Border Ethereal, overlap the Material Plane and the Inner Planes, so that every location on those planes has a corresponding location on the Ethereal Plane. Certain creatures can see into the Border Ethereal, and the *see invisibility* and *true seeing* spell grant that ability. Some magical effects also extend from the Material Plane into the Border Ethereal, particularly effects that use force energy such as *forcecage* and *wall*

of force. The depths of the plane, the Deep Ethereal, are a region of swirling mists and colorful fogs.

The **Astral Plane** is the realm of thought and dream, where visitors travel as disembodied souls to reach the planes of the divine and demonic. It is a great, silvery sea, the same above and below, with swirling wisps of white and gray streaking among motes of light resembling distant stars. Erratic whirlpools of color flicker in midair like spinning coins. Occasional bits of solid matter can be found here, but most of the Astral Plane is an endless, open domain.

INNER PLANES

The Inner Planes surround and enfold the Material Plane and its echoes, providing the raw elemental substance from which all the worlds were made. The four **Elemental Planes**—Air, Earth, Fire, and Water—form a ring around the Material Plane, suspended within the churning **Elemental Chaos**.

At their innermost edges, where they are closest to the Material Plane (in a conceptual if not a literal geographical sense), the four Elemental Planes resemble a world in the Material Plane. The four elements mingle together as they do in the Material Plane, forming land, sea, and sky. Farther from the Material Plane, though, the Elemental Planes are both alien and hostile. Here, the elements exist in their purest form—great expanses of solid earth, blazing fire, crystal-clear water, and unsullied air. These regions are little-known, so when discussing the Plane of Fire, for example, a speaker usually means just the border region. At the farthest extents of the Inner Planes, the pure elements dissolve and bleed together into an unending tumult of clashing energies and colliding substance, the Elemental Chaos.

OUTER PLANES

If the Inner Planes are the raw matter and energy that makes up the multiverse, the Outer Planes are the direction, thought and purpose for such construction. Accordingly, many sages refer to the Outer Planes as divine planes, spiritual planes, or godly planes, for the Outer Planes are best known as the homes of deities.

When discussing anything to do with deities, the language used must be highly metaphorical. Their actual homes are not literally “places” at all, but exemplify the idea that the Outer Planes are realms of thought and spirit. As with the Elemental Planes, one can imagine the perceptible part of the Outer Planes as a sort of border region, while extensive spiritual regions lie beyond ordinary sensory experience.

Even in those perceptible regions, appearances can be deceptive. Initially, many of the Outer Planes appear hospitable and familiar to natives of the Material Plane. But the landscape can change at the whims of the powerful forces that live on the Outer Planes. The desires of the mighty forces that dwell on these planes can remake them completely, effectively erasing and rebuilding existence itself to better fulfill their own needs.

Distance is a virtually meaningless concept on the Outer Planes. The perceptible regions of the planes often seem quite small, but they can also stretch on to what seems like infinity. It might be possible to take a guided tour of the Nine Hells, from the first layer to the ninth, in a single day—if the powers of the Hells desire it. Or it could take weeks for travelers to make a grueling trek across a single layer.

The most well-known Outer Planes are a group of sixteen planes that correspond to the eight alignments (excluding neutrality) and the shades of distinction between them.

OUTER PLANES

Outer Plane	Alignment
Mount Celestia, the Seven Heavens of	LG
Bytopia, the Twin Paradises of	NG, LG
Elysium, the Blessed Fields of	NG
The Beastlands, the Wilderness of	NG, CG
Arborea, the Olympian Glades of	CG
Ysgard, the Heroic Domains of	CN, CG
Limbo, the Ever-Changing Chaos of	CN
Pandemonium, the Windswept Depths of	CN, CE
The Abyss, the Infinite Layers of	CE
Carceri, the Tarterian Depths of	NE, CE
Hades, the Gray Waste of	NE
Gehenna, the Bleak Eternity of	NE, LE
The Nine Hells (of Baator)	LE
Acheron, the Infinite Battlefield of	LN, LE
Mechanus, the Clockwork Nirvana of	LN
Arcadia, the Peaceable Kingdoms of	LN, LG

The planes with some element of good in their nature are called the **Upper Planes**. Celestial creatures such as angels and pegasi dwell in the Upper Planes. Planes with some element of evil are the **Lower Planes**. Fiends such as demons, devils, and yugoloths dwell in the Lower Planes. A plane's alignment is its essence, and a character whose alignment doesn't match the plane's experiences a profound sense of dissonance there. When a good creature visits Elysium, for example, it feels in tune with the plane, but an evil creature feels out of tune and more than a little uncomfortable.

OTHER PLANES

Existing somehow between or beyond the known planes of existence are a variety of other realms.

SIGIL AND THE OUTLANDS

The Outlands is the plane between the Outer Planes, a plane of neutrality, but not the neutrality of nothingness. Instead it incorporates a little of everything, keeping it all in a paradoxical balance—simultaneously concordant and in opposition. It is a broad region of varied terrain, with open prairies, towering mountains, and twisting, shallow rivers, strongly resembling an ordinary world of the Material Plane.

The Outlands is circular, like a great wheel—in fact, those who envision the Outer Planes as a wheel point to the Outlands as proof, calling it a microcosm of the

planes. That argument might be circular, however, for it is possible that the arrangement of the Outlands inspired the idea of the Great Wheel in the first place.

Around the outside edge of the circle, evenly spaced, are the **gate-towns**: sixteen settlements, each built around a portal leading to one of the Outer Planes. Each town shares many of the characteristics of the plane where its gate leads.

At the center of the Outlands, like the axle of the planar wheel, the Spire shoots impossibly high into the sky. Above this thin peak floats the ring-shaped city of Sigil, the City of Doors. This bustling planar metropolis holds countless portals to other planes and worlds.

Sigil is a trader's city. Goods, merchandise, and information come to it from across the planes. There is a brisk trade in information about the planes, in particular in the command words or items required for the operation of particular portals. These portal keys are highly sought after, and many travelers within the city are looking for a particular portal or a portal key to allow them to continue on their way.

DEMIPLANES

Demiplanes are small extradimensional spaces with their own unique rules. They are pieces of reality that don't seem to fit anywhere else. Demiplanes come into being by a variety of means. Some are created by spells, such as *demiplane*, or generated at the desire of a powerful deity or other force. They may exist naturally, as a fold of existing reality that has been pinched off from the rest of the multiverse, or as a baby universe growing in power. A given demiplane can be entered through a single point where it touches another plane. Theoretically, a *plane shift* spell can also carry travelers to a demiplane, but the proper frequency required for the tuning fork is extremely hard to acquire. The *gate* spell is more reliable, assuming the caster knows of the demiplane.

THE FAR REALM

The Far Realm is beyond the known multiverse. In fact, it might be an entirely separate multiverse with its own physical and magical laws. Where stray energies from the Far Realm leak onto another plane, life and matter are warped and twisted into alien shapes that defy ordinary geometry and biology.

The entities that abide in the Far Realm are too alien for a normal mind to accept without damage. Titanic creatures swim through nothingness, preoccupied with madness. Unspeakable things whisper awful truths to those who dare listen. For mortals, knowledge of the Far Realm is a triumph of mind over the rude boundaries of matter, space, and eventually sanity.

There are no known portals to the Far Realm, or at least none that are still viable. Ancient elves once pierced the boundary of eons with a vast portal to the Far Realm within a mountain called Firestorm Peak, but their civilization imploded in bloody terror and the portal's location—even its home world—is long-forgotten. Other portals might still exist, marked by the alien forces leaking through to corrupt the Material Plane around them.

