



Playing on the Other Planes of Existence

Details of the various planes of existence which surround and complement the Prime Material Plane have, until now, been left to the various DMs. Because AD&D has many more strictures than does D&D, I felt that maintaining such areas as the purview of the DM allowed the opportunity for creativity and imaginative input to a degree greater than that in D&D. After all, here were virtual universes to order.

But on second thought, it is perhaps a bit too much. Outside of a few facts regarding the principal creatures inhabiting some of these planes, there is nothing upon which to build. While a few highly dedicated and exceptionally creative individuals have undoubtedly found the time and energy and inspiration to begin development of the milieu of a plane or planes, most DMs have shied away from the undertaking—at least as a really divergent game system.

In fact, upon reflection on the matter, it doesn't make a great deal of sense to offer areas totally unrelated to the general framework of AD&D. Games other than AD&D do that. What is needed is a system providing ties to the structure of AD&D, but as a skeleton only, thus giving a starting frame of reference for individual creativity.

Consider the total formlessness of the Plane of Hades, for example. AD&D relates that the place is the realm of Neutral Evil. Night hags, nightmares, and larva are found there, as the MONSTER MANUAL states. Daemonkind roam the plane. Certain magic items and spells will not work there. So much for the data available on the plane. This is pretty sketchy information, and the DM must be inventive and innovative indeed to construct a whole milieu and devise rules for the place, unless he or she resorts to AD&D.

Now, this is all well and good, but the sheer mass of rules will require extensive effort at merely categorizing, noting differences, and then constructing replacement sections. As the planes are interconnected to the AD&D multiverse, it is actually TSR's job, and mine, to see that the laborious functions are weeded out into what is not a part of a given plane and what is germane. This task must be handled so as to avoid unnecessary restrictions. It must give a basis upon which to develop a special milieu, but not set forth yet another tight set of rules which must be strictly adhered to.

This same principle applies to all portions of the AD&D multiverse not immediate to the rules, i.e. the parallel worlds and universes. If one

assumes that the planes which surround the AD&D Prime Material Plane are repeated ad infinitum around parallel worlds, then there is an opening to the true infinity of creativity.

We can concern ourselves directly, however, with only those areas which are immediate to AD&D. Thus, a parallel world based on GAMMA WORLD and another rooted in BOOT HILL are proper considerations, but the planes which surround these milieux are the purview of the DM. There may be such planes, only some of them or none. The framework for the parallel world is provided in the game system; alterations for its adaption to AD&D are given, with respect to GW and BH, in the DUNGEON MASTERS GUIDE. All other details, from how adventurers enter the plane to how they can return to the "normal" AD&D universe, are left to the DM.

This brings us to the delineation of what needs to be done to allow the game master to construct variations based on other planes and parallel worlds with a maximum of creative latitude and a minimum of routine labor.

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Obviously, it is impossible to deal with more than a few of the possible parallel worlds. Those which are based on other TSR games can be detailed to some extent. Suggestions are easily drawn from such conversion modes and can be applied to other publishers' designs or the authored mythoi desired by the DM as the framework for alternate milieux. That leaves the Inner and Outer Planes of the AD&D universe as the main subject for development. Certain of these planes attract more attention, and these popular areas are the ones which must receive attention first.

When ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was still in its earliest conceptual stage, Steve Marsh and I exchanged considerable correspondence pertaining to the planes. I then had to immerse myself in the task of setting the design to paper, and for several years Steve and I exchanged only brief letters on an occasional basis. During this relative hiatus, I also worked up a number of dungeon modules, including the series which will culminate in an adventure on one of the planes of the Abyss Q1, QUEEN OF THE DEMONWEB PITS).

It so happened that Dave Sutherland had a splendid inspiration regarding this setting, so my rather sketchy notes were set aside for use in another module, and Dave was given the go-ahead to do the scenario. (As of this writing, it is nearly complete, and I hope that it will soon find its way into print!) The information in the module should be sufficient to serve as a guide for development of the entire 666 "layers" of the Abyss. I expect that extrapolation will allow rather speedy handling of the other lower planes as well, with emphasis on Hell, of course, as it is the other most treated/frequented area in campaigns. Still other planes are badly in need of attention.

The other obvious candidates are the Astral, Ethereal, and Elemental planes. I have suggested that TSR's design staff go to work on modules dealing with adventures which feature the Astral Plane and the Ethereal Plane. There will also be encouragement to do modules which place action on Lower Planes. The Elemental Planes are another matter, despite my "having heard some of TSR's designers express an interest in doing work involving such planes. Steve Marsh and I are again engaged in fairly regular correspondence, and just awhile back he sent me some material he had written regarding adventures on these planes. I hope to be able to find the time to work this material into a form usable with AD&D, add my own ideas, kick the whole back to Steve for his further commentary and addition; and then we'll hopefully be able to offer a set of four or more modules which will provide interesting adventures, many new creatures (populating the respective Elemental Planes), new magic items/forms, and still provide a vehicle for expansion and extrapolation.

Properly done, such modules will be the guidelines with which the DM can create new milieux. Although I have been, and will be, involved with the development of all treatments of the AD&D planes, I am particularly desirous of having initial, direct input in the writing of material pertaining to the Elemental Planes.

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It is of interest to relate that just prior to the appearance of the excellent article "Elementals and the Philosopher's Stone," by Jeff

Swycaffer (THE DRAGON #27, Vol. IV, No. 1, July 1979), Dave Sutherland and I were discussing the various Elemental Planes, concentrating on the borderland areas between them, i.e. where Water touches Air and Earth and where Fire touches Air and Earth. Mr. Swycaffer's ideas were good indeed, and if *vapor* is substituted for "moist" and dust is used to replace the term "dry/dryness," you will have a good idea as to how the borderlands between Elemental Planes will be treated. Naturally, the denizens of these regions, "para-elementals" (not to be confused with Fritz Leiber's "paramentals") and other things, will also add to the overall scope of the game.

The ethical/moral concepts of good and evil do not, I believe, properly belong to any treatment of the elemental area, *per se*. But while there will be no "good" or "evil" elemental type, there certainly must be elementals of good or evil disposition to complement those of neutral bent.

Similarly, the attributes of barrenness and fertility, the conditions of pleasure and pain, and the states of beginning and end are not elemental in the sense of the term used in AD&D. The presence or absence of light isn't necessarily tied to the elemental principle either, although it is a very nice touch with respect to the polarity of the "Philosopher's Stone."

While certain of the precepts of Mr. Swycaffer's article will be evident in treatments of the various Elemental Planes, the whole will not be there. This is mentioned so that Dungeon masters reading this article will be able to peruse these modules with the aim of understanding the methods by which rules and an overall scheme were selected and tied together to arrive at something similar, yet different, in AD&D. If you have opinions which you wish to share with us, please drop me a line. Better still, if you have what you believe is an outstanding treatment of one of the planes, why not submit it to TSR's design department?

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There is no question that it will be some time before any significant amount of material detailing adventures on other planes will be forthcoming from TSR. It will take me two or three months to prepare a rough draft of even one such module, and allowing a like amount of time for Steve Marsh to work it over, and then no less than six months to go through production, means that the first such scenario (not including QUEEN OF THE DEMONWEB PITS, which is due out soon now, as I said previously) won't appear until about one year after you

have read this article. That, Dear Reader, is a minor miracle in itself, as fully ready games take usually about one year between completion and release.

Because the subject matter is close to regular AD&D play—many elementals and creatures of the Elemental Planes are regular inhabitants of the campaign milieu and are summoned by spells—development of information on how to set up and run scenarios dealing with these planes is important. Likewise, such information will enable DM's to prepare for such activity on the other planes as well.

AD&D is an ongoing game. It offers variety of play and development of characters in a linear direction. Unquestionably, the addition of other planes for adventuring purposes will certainly excite participants, offering them new areas to explore and new challenges.

DM's developing their own data will be able to institute new rules which they have always wanted to try without disturbing the conformity of the basic AD&D campaign. The planes offer an endless field for creative design and play, connected to, but not necessarily a part of, the general AD&D campaign. These offshoots can coexist and not change the game into some variant which will eventually terminate the group from the mainstream of the game as played throughout the world. This potential gives the best of both (all) worlds, and the Elemental Planes will certainly provide the best springboard to development of all of the planes.

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In a previous column I mentioned that I would set up an adventure where the players would end up in the city streets of the 20th century. Well, I knocked together some rules, put the scenario together, stocked the place with "treasures" of a technological sort, and sprinkled some monsters (thugs, gangs, police, etc.) around.

Much to my chagrin, Ernie the Barbarian was leading the expedition. When his party emerged from the subway—and despite the general blackout in the city due to the power failure caused by their entry into this alternate world—he stopped, looked, listened and then headed back for the "safety" of the "real world!" Some people really know how to spoil a DM's fun. . . .

If any of you have conducted a successful adventure in a modern urban setting, please write me about it, including the rules modifications and additions used. If I get something on this, a future column will include the story and the rules used, along with those I devised. If there is nothing received, I'll assume that the setting is not popular enough to warrant further discussion and drop it.

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