

The Near Planes



Aden is a world that has embraced science and technology, but in doing so, it has not abandoned magic, which remains a powerful, pervasive force throughout every corner of the Known Lands and beyond. In the long periods of peace that have dominated recent history in Aden, those capable of wielding magic have had the freedom and the resources to study it extensively, and while little is known with absolute certainty, there are nonetheless concepts and theories that have been generally agreed upon because the evidence to support them is so strong. Chief among these is the theory of the planes that exist beyond the physical world of Aden.

The long-standing theory advanced by the Celestial College is that the world of Aden exists at a confluence of planes where varying forces of magic converged to create a world where physical matter is the dominant trait, something that is not true in the other planes. Matter may exist in the Elemental Plane of Fire, for example, but it is matter that is fire given form rather than matter in its own right. This is, perhaps, why objects in Aden are relatively easily enchanted with any manner of magic the creator prefers, whether it is elemental or some other form of arcane or divine magic whose properties the object takes on.

This is not to say that there are not other planes that have similar properties to the mortal world. Those realms closest to the physical world often have similar aspects, and for that reason they can occasionally be accessed via naturally occurring gateways between the worlds. Sometimes these gateways can last for very long times, even becoming semi-permanent. More often, they last for a short while or even for a period of years, and then gradually fade away as the borders between the worlds separate or become stronger.

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ARCADIA

Simultaneously considered one of the near planes most similar to Aden and one of the most dangerous to visit, the plane of Arcadia has a long history of interaction with the mortal world. While historical records are almost non-existent in the wake of the Great War, there are a few remaining manuscripts and oral traditions that tell of the denizens of Arcadia having free reign throughout the region currently known as the High Steppes. It is believed that this long-standing convergence between the two planes gave rise to the faerkin race, a hybrid of human and fey ancestries that has become a fixture in the modern era of Aden. While this is the most profound of the impacts that Arcadia has had on the mortal world, it is by no means the only one.

Those who have the misfortune of finding themselves in Arcadia discover a vast and verdant realm, dominated by idyllic forests, plains, and other temperate climates. There are occasional swamp-like regions, but their appearance is infrequent to the point that they must be sought out rather than encountered deliberately. The weather remains constant and is divided geographically. The farther north one travels the more summer-like the weather is, while the southern reaches are much more wintry, despite that the snow never reaches the point of impeding travel. The east and west most commonly resemble fall and spring, respectively. There are small islands of civilization here and there, almost exclusively in the form of very traditional castles with villages built around the exteriors. These are the homes of powerful fey lords and ladies, who hold their courts there. Despite the many dangers that Arcadia holds, there is no more dangerous place for a mortal anywhere in the plane than in one of these courts. The fey there are incredibly powerful, immortal, bored, and wildly entertained by mortals and their discomfort and suffering. Tormenting mortals indirectly (or sometimes directly, in the courts found in the southern reaches) is considered a favored pastime.

The wilderness may be somewhat safer for mortals, but only by a slim margin. The wilderness is filled with normal beasts, many of whom have been augmented or enchanted by various lesser fey in some way. The fey themselves are a constant threat, with gremlins, brownies, pixies, and all other manner of creatures filling the woods and plains. In the fall and winter regions, as well as the periodic swamp terrains, much more dangerous creatures may also be found, including nightmarish entities such as boggarts, bogeymen, grimstalkers, and even the dreaded whisper fiend, all of whom delight in hunting mortals for sport and terror. Although the few unfortunate humans who have strayed into Arcadia can recognize the distinction between the threats of different regions, they are generally unaware of the reasons. Ironically, they are largely political in nature.

The four realms of Arcadia are indeed seasonal, as described above, but this is a direct function of their allegiance to the various fey courts rather than a natural or even magical phenomenon; the lords of the four highest courts possess such remarkable power that their very existence warps the landscape to suit their personalities and preferences. The Summer and Winter Courts are the most powerful, but the Spring and Autumn Courts still wield significant power and cannot be dismissed because of their relatively lesser status. The most powerful of the rulers is King Lyrian, the Lord of Summer, who reigns in the northernmost reaches of Arcadia. Reaching his court, like all the courts, seems impossible for non-fey, as the realm stretches on seemingly without limit. Lyrian's realm is easily identifiable, however, as it is far more orderly than the rest of Arcadia. Roads and trails are carefully maintained, any structures that one stumbles across (which are more common than in the other reaches but still quite rare) are neat and tidy, and even the trees seem evenly spaced and properly pruned. Lyrian himself is a stoic warrior who maintains a steely façade, but it is whispered among his subjects that his ongoing estrangement from his wife causes him tremendous suffering. Lyrian's realm may be slightly safer for interlopers than others, but he nevertheless regards trespass as a nigh-unforgivable sin and will often as not call out a Wild Hunt to pursue those who venture into his domain.

Far to the south, the king's estranged wife, Queen Lylith, the Lady of Winter, holds her court. She is vastly different from Lyrian, with a teasing, almost playful demeanor that quickly and easily ranges into cruelty. Without question, her court is the deadliest of an already deadly group of environments. She almost welcomes intrusion into her realm because it rapidly becomes a major event, with a festival-like celebration among her subjects, invariably as cruel and monstrous as she, and few manage to escape or even survive. Much like her estranged husband, however, many among her subjects believe that her behavior is being exacerbated by her sorrow over the estrangement, something that most who have run afoul of her ire would find bizarre at the very least. Her relationship with her children seems much less of a sticking point, however.

The eastern and western reaches are the domain of Lyrian and Lylith's children, Prince Lysander of the Autumn Court and Princess Lorelai of the Spring Court. Neither have pledged their full allegiance to either parent, but in general, Lorelai tends to side with her father more frequently and Lysander with his mother. Without question, Lorelai is the most hospitable to travelers from Aden, possessing the nobility of her father combined with a bit of her mother's humor, but she is far from safe. Lysander, on the other hand, is as rigid and inflexible as the king with a portion of his dourness, but also the cruelty and irritability of his mother, making him distinctly unpleasant if still not quite as mercurial as Queen Lylith.

THE ELEMENTAL PLANES

Perhaps the closest planar neighbor to the material world of Aden is not a single realm, but an overlapping series of planes tied to the four elements that make up the sum total of physical matter. There is a convincing argument to be made, and one that was made often when the Celestial College of Aramyst would hold discussions of such esoteric matters, is that Aden exists where the four elemental planes meet, their energies having combined to create the material world from the substance of their four elements. Given the solitary nature of all other known planes, this particular concept of overlap is odd enough that many scholars have debated how such a thing could have ever occurred. Some believe that it is merely a sort of cosmic accident, while others believe that such a thing is virtually impossible and that it must be an intentional act of creation by unknown parties, and of course there are plenty who have claimed that the theory itself is deeply flawed and that there is no significant evidence to suggest that this Convergence Theory holds any relevance whatsoever.

The Elemental Plane of Fire is the plane that is of most interest in modern Aden, because many theorize that the Burning Coast of Aramyst was somehow affected by it during the Darkfall, and that is the reason for its continued immolation more than ten years later. Because the conditions on the coast are so extreme, traveling there requires the most powerful protection against fire magic available, and there are few who are capable that are also willing to travel there. This same scarcity of individuals has ensured that very few have traveled to the Plane of Fire in recent years, but in earlier ages, there were powerful wizards and scholars who made the trip, and trips to other planes, so some knowledge of those realms is still available for those who are interested in such pursuits.

The Plane of Fire is almost completely inhospitable to mortal life, with much of the landscape being filled with open flame and magma, and the temperature is far above what could normally sustain any of Aden's lifeforms. Like all the Elemental Planes, its most populous form of life is elementals of varying size and power, but there are others who make their home there as well, including for example the azer, who appear to be somehow related to the dwarven race; an oddity, given that race's obvious affinity for the element of earth, and not one that has ever been satisfactorily explained. The superheated atmosphere is full of smoke and ash, and even if the temperature could be tolerated, most typical lifeforms exposed to such an environment would perish in minutes even if the temperature could be endured.

Although no less dangerous than the Plane of Fire, the Plane of Air is much less actively deadly by dint of merely being present within it. As the name suggests, it is a vast realm with nothing but endless sky. If one without the capability for flight found themselves within it, they would plummet for ages before, theoretically passing through to the Plane of Earth, where they would abruptly find themselves hurtling toward rocky terrain at a high rate of speed. It is also the least understood of all the elemental planes, as there are rumors that its denizens dwell within cities that cannot be perceived by material beings. This may be some manner of hoax, as the beings that call the plane home are notoriously prone to trickery and deceit, but neither can the claim be truly discounted. There has been a long-standing theory among scholars that the race of elves may have originated in the Plane of Air and somehow migrated to the material world when it was created. This theory hinges on the similarities between the ancient elven language and the variant of Fundamental, the language spoken by all elemental beings, prominent in the Plane of Air. Again, like all things concerning this plane, there is little to substantiate it.

There is more known of the Plane of Earth than of other elemental planes, as earth is the most stolid and straightforward of all elements. At first glance, it possesses several superficial similarities to the Plane of Fire, due to its rocky, mountainous landscape. However, there are no rivers of magma or open flame. There is little to no plant life or water, or anything other than extremely thin air and vast, endless rocks and mountains. A visitor to this realm might easily labor under the belief that there is no life within the plane based upon this vista. This is grossly mistaken, however, because the “surface” of the plane is but one tiny fragment of a much greater realm. The vast majority of it is subterranean, where tunnel networks stretch for thousands upon thousands of miles without end, broken by massive, province-sized caverns that are home to all variety of life born of stone and earth. Dwarves are believed to have emigrated from this plane to the material world untold ages ago, crossing perhaps unknowingly through a portal from their subterranean world into the underworld of Aden. It is possible that a portal still exists, linking the so-called deep dwarves to that plane.

The Plane of Water is a tempestuous and troublesome place. There is no portion of it that is not completely submerged. Vast coral cities lie near the seafloor, which remains illuminated as the entire plane is by an unknown source. Life is in abundance and virtually everywhere, from schools of simple fish that traverse the depths to massive predators larger than any creature that exists in the material world. The most common intelligent life in the realm are a form of merfolk, or so they identify, which appear similar in many respects to certain species of slurghians in the material realm. Ironically, despite that water is the most changeable and unpredictable of the elements, the Plane of Water is perhaps the most orderly, with numerous different kingdoms of intelligent beings controlling different regions and all coexisting relatively peacefully.

JHUNDATA

The plane of Jhundata is something of a mystery to planar scholars, or at least it was when such pursuits could be undertaken with impunity. The origins of Jhundata are completely unknown. Such could be said about any plane, realistically, but at least most planes seem to serve a particular niche or purpose in the greater cosmology of Aden. Jhundata, on the other hand, is a verdant wilderness completely dominated by a particular form of life: insectile.

The realm of Jhundata was discovered within a decade of the Peace of the Rose, when a collaboration between the royal family of Kyan and a handful of scholars from Le’Ciel embarked on an investigation as to the strange nature of the Crawling Jungle, a major landform that exists despite the climate and location relative to the equator should preclude such a dense, massive jungle from ever having formed in the first place,

not to mention the exceptionally peculiar wildlife that dominate the entire region in the form of gigantic insect species found nowhere else in the Known Lands. The investigative cabal began with a series of theories that could explain the phenomenon, including everything from deliberate experimentation by a previously unknown civilization to a large-scale magical accident in a previous age. Ultimately, however, they discovered that the planar barrier throughout the region that had become Kyan was thinner than to be expected, much in the same way that it was believed the barrier between the material world and Arcadia had once been very thin in the region now known as the High Steppes. With some difficulty, the investigators managed to cross over to the previously unknown plane and perform some perfunctory examination of it and its native properties.

Jhundata is a verdant wilderness, a thick, dense jungle that never ends, broken only occasionally by mountains at infrequent intervals. And much like the Crawling Jungle that very closely resembles the plane, Jhundata teems with insectile life. Every manner of insect can be found there, from the miniscule species encountered everywhere in the Known Lands to the towering juggernauts used as beasts of burden and living siege engines within Kyanite society. Numerous different intelligent races dwell there as well, although they are so alien as to preclude any significant contact with the people of Aden. It is currently theorized by prominent entomancers that the ilithix originated within Jhundata as well, and that perhaps the Brood Mother of that race crossed over into the material world at some point in the distant past. While she would then be an outsider, her various hives and children that were born in Aden would be natives, thus explaining why this potential link was not previously discovered.

The existence of Jhundata is tied not only to Kyan as a whole, but to the practice of entomancy specifically. It is believed that there are those who are born with an affinity for plane and its energies as a result of their birth in a region so closely aligned with it. It is this planar affinity that allows them to command other species that share it, and it seems evidential that all insect species have at least a tentative link to Jhundata in one form or another. Entomancers, therefore, can command insects anywhere, regardless of whether in the plane that gives them their power, the material world, or anywhere else.

In the grand scheme of things, Jhundata is a plane that can and does support life as it exists in the mortal realm and is one more suitable than most to travelers from Aden. This is not to say that it is safe, however; the insects that make their home there are instinctual creatures and tend to view everything in terms of whether or not it is a potential rival or prey, and travelers often fall into one of those two categories. Those native to Kyan tend to have the skills and knowledge necessary to survive in that realm, and there are a small handful of extremely isolationist individuals who have chosen to do just that. The terms of the alignment between the material world and Jhundata are unknown, and it is entirely possible that the convergence between the two will come to an end at some point, just as the thin boundary between the High Steppes and Arcadia eventually returned to normal. If and when this happens, it remains unknown what the effect on the ecology of Kyan and the Crawling Jungle might be, assuming that there is such an effect at all.

New Feat: Student of the Planes

You have studied the planes at length and know a great deal about them.

Benefit: You may target a specific extraplanar entity and make a Knowledge (planes) roll against DC 10 plus the CR of the entity in question. If successful, you gain the benefits of having that specific creature as a Favored Enemy as if you were a first level ranger. This benefit lasts for five minutes and can only be used against one creature at a time.

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