

METAPLANAR GAZETTEER:*Crystalwell*

On a far edge of the Pole of Elemental Air, where droplets of elemental water drift in on cold breezes and large snowflakes, floats a strange crystalline structure known as the Crystalwell. The rectangular crystal hangs in the empty air, with cold winds whipping around it. A traveler that journeys close can see pier-like crystals extending from the structure and doorways leading inside.

The Crystalwell is home to Sigh-on-an-Arctic-Wind, a powerful free air elemental, and her legion of lesser air elemental servants. From here she entertains herself by dabbling in the courts of air and water elementals, acting as a diplomat between the two elemental poles. She is a pragmatic and analytical spirit who can often cut through the tempers of more emotional elemental beings, making her an invaluable asset here on the border between planes. In fact, it is not uncommon to see some strange conveyance docked at the crystal piers, whether a vast airship or an inconceivably large flying whale, as spiritual parties seek Sigh-on-an-Arctic-Wind's audience.

Hermetic mages who have angered entities from the Poles of Elemental Air or Water often travel to the Crystalwell in an attempt to come to a peaceful compromise. Some ambitious or foolish mages have come in an attempt to force Sigh-on-an-Arctic-Wind to part with the considerable secrets she has on many entities in the two planes. Still other mages have found their way here by accident, perhaps after summoning one of the air elementals who typically lives here in service to its frosty mistress.

THE METAPLANES

Somewhere, outside the twin planes of the physical and astral, swirls a string of many worlds collectively called the metaplanes. It is within the metaplanes that spirits make their native homes and it is from the metaplanes that mana originates. Beyond that, they are virtually impossible to define. Some say the metaplanes are really just a single infinite expanse divvied up and shaped by spirits. Others say that they are countless separate worlds orbiting the physical and astral planes in a clockwork metaphysical dance. Still others say that the metaplanes have no true form at all and are simply a way of tapping into mankind's universal subconscious, which shifts in nature based on the perceiver. Perhaps the spirits that make the metaplanes their home know the answer, but whatever explanations they give are more deception than truth. Maybe even the spirits do not understand the nature of their homes; they do not care to debate the matter.

WORLDS BEYOND POSSIBILITY

The celestial mechanics of the metaplanes are largely beyond comprehension, but that does not stop some driven magical scholars from attempting to understand them. Some magicians claim that the metaplanes correspond to the types of spirits that exist. The native plane of a spirit of air would be, quite obviously to these theorists, a Metaplane of Air. It becomes very hard to prove or disprove this theory when no definitive map of the Metaplane of Air exists, nor do the descriptions of such a place match up from one magician to another. To complicate the matter further, many magicians claim their spirits come from places unique to their traditional outlook and no one can prove if those places are separate or part of a greater whole. A Chinese magician might track the home of one of his spirits of man to a heavenly city that houses the Celestial Bureaucracy. Is this heavenly city a separate metaplane or simply a region within a greater one? Who can really say? Perhaps the only thing magicians agree upon about the metaplanes is that they can bring you great power or a horrible death. Next to that, the details seem very academic.

Traveling to the Metaplanes

Journeying to the metaplanes is never something to be undertaken lightly. Only an initiate to the higher mysteries of magic can travel to the metaplanes without outside assistance (see *Initiate Powers*, p. 189, *SR4*). Even then, the initiate must first face the Dweller on the Threshold, as detailed under *Metaplanar Quests*, p. 130. It is possible for mundanes and non-initiates to travel to the metaplanes, but only through the effort of some outside source, such as a spirit's Astral Gateway power (p. 98) or contact with an astral rift (p. 116). Certain Awakened drugs and magical compounds can also cause a mundane or non-initiate to enter the metaplanes, though their use is often dangerous and the user's destination is unpredictable.

Metaplanar Physics and Metaphor

A traveler to the metaplanes experiences each plane much like he experiences the physical world (rather than astral space). The look and feel of a metaplane may differ quite drastically from any place in the real world, however, and even the physical laws may be different. The ineffable nature of the metaplanes makes describing them difficult, but each place within the metaplanes can be described according to a specific *metaphor*. This metaphor governs the physical characteristics, environment, and laws of the place—including the form the character takes (see *Metaplanar Forms*). Metaphors often suit the spirits or the tradition that correspond to that particular metaplane, and may range from the simple (an underwater metaphor for the Plane of Water) to the bizarre (see the Crystalwell description, p. 128).

Metaplanar Forms

When a traveler has arrived in a metaplane, he takes on a metaplanar form, similar to an astral form (see *Astral Forms*, p. 183, *SR4*). Damage inflicted upon a metaplanar form can be either Physical or Stun damage and the magician's earth-

bound body will feel and react to such damage. Similarly, damage inflicted on the earthbound body will affect the metaplanar form. If a magician is killed in the metaplanes, the earthbound body will go comatose, much like when a magician dies while astrally projecting (see *While You Were Out ...*, p. 184, SR4).

Unlike an astral form, however, the metaplanar form is based entirely on the metaplanar visitor's physical body—modified as necessary to fit the plane's metaphor. Physical attributes are used on the metaplanes, as are the standard rules for combat. In many cases, any cyberware or bio-ware the visitor possesses will also function in the metaplane, though it may appear differently, depending on the metaphor. For instance, if the metaplane were based on an Industrial Age society, cyberware may appear as steampunk pistons and clockwork gears. If the metaplane is naturalistic and wild, cyberware may appear as fetishes and charms worn by the visitor. If the metaphor of the metaplane supports the necessary technology, hacking and rigging may be possible (at the gamemaster's discretion). Astral perception is also typically possible on the metaplanes, but a metaplanar form can never astrally project as he is already outside his real body, no matter how real his metaplanar form may seem.

Unlike astral projection, a metaplanar visitor can maintain his metaplanar form indefinitely (unless he is in the deep metaplanes, see below); the traveler's body simply remains in a coma-like state until he returns. Time within a metaplane is subjective, however, so what may feel like weeks in a metaplane make only take a few minutes of real world time (and vice versa).

The Deep Metaplanes

Over the course of decades, initiates have visited the metaplanes countless times, journeying to the places where the spirits they conjure originate. Even differences in tradition do not bar an initiate from these planes; a hermetic mage may visit a metaplane that is home to many spirits of beasts as easily as he would visit the home metaplane of the fire elementals he conjures. Though teaching and belief may limit the spirits a magician can conjure, these metaplanes and the Earth share a link that allows spirits and magicians



to travel between the worlds—but this is not so with all of the metaplanes.

Some metaplanes—collectively known as the deep metaplanes—are harder to reach and more dangerous to explore. Scholars are unsure what makes these metaplanes different, but many believe there is a link between the difficulty of reaching these metaplanes and the ambient mana level on Earth. An initiate may not simply choose to journey to a deep metaplane as he would a typical metaplane; he must be guided there. In most cases, this requires a spirit native to the particular deep metaplane to guide the initiate, but there are rare cases where an astral rift may open to a deep metaplane or an astral construct or link may point the way.

The spirits that are native to these deep metaplanes are themselves strange and alien, different in many ways from the typical spirits that magicians deal with. These extraplanar denizens are known to include insect spirits and shedim,