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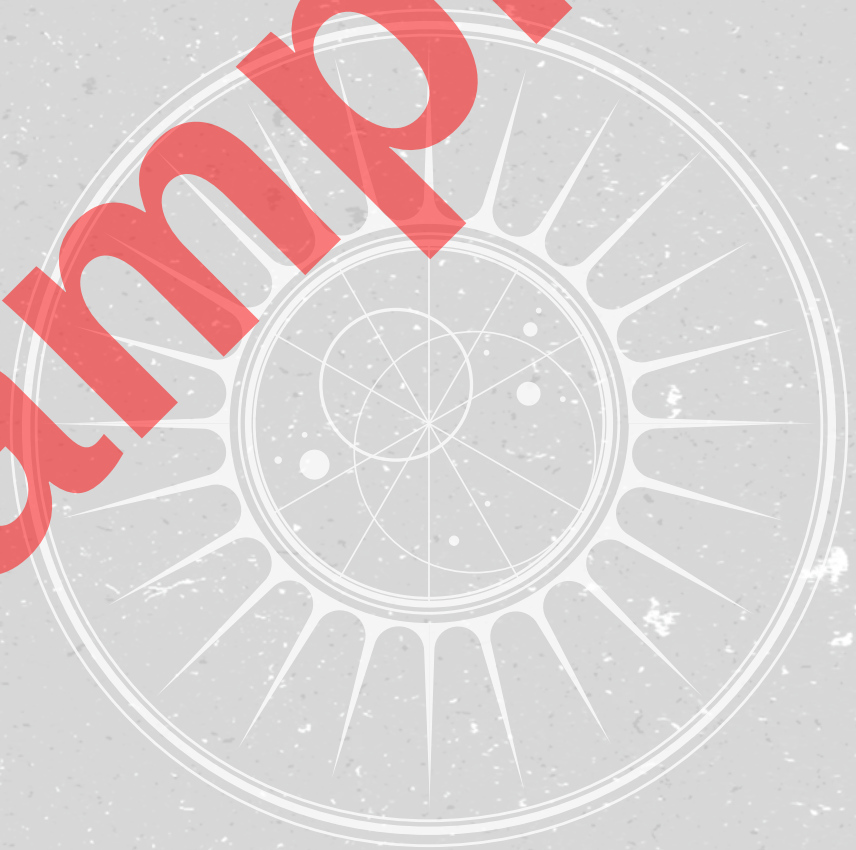

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By the Authority of the Queen

Frog-People

Star-Palace of the Polluted Priest

A long-planned ambush

Mummification

Tension between the religious leadership and a criminal group

Hills

A Subterranean Place

Visited by a ghost

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The first way to use the book is as a walk-through procedure for building a world, which is probably the way most readers will initially approach it, and especially the way most first-time world-builders will begin. You can start at the beginning of the book and follow the process through.

The second way to approach the book though, is to use it as an idea-generator for selected parts of the worldbuilding process, dipping into the book for inspiration rather than following it as a procedural manual. Many people have map-making or map-designing skills that eclipse anything random tables can suggest for map-making. Others are brilliant at creating prophecies and stories to fill in the background tapestry of a fantasy world. I would venture to say that anyone running a fantasy roleplaying game can probably outdo the creative results from this book in at least one area of world design.

Despite the fact that the book is presented as a procedural sequence, it's actually designed more for the experienced world builder who needs an inspiration tool from time to time in the process. It's always easier to create from something on the page than it is from nothing, and random-generation tables are particularly good for this because you can see all the surrounding results on the table along with whatever result you actually rolled with the dice. These ideas are placed into tables (rather than lists) so you *can* get a random, kick-in-the-pants starting point with the dice, but the moment an inspiration draws you away from the die roll, follow that inspiration!

As I have said at the end of many an introduction: Imagine the Hell out of it!

FOLLOWING THE PLAN

If your objective is to start at the beginning and work your way through, here is a brief walk-through of the chapters with their primary objectives.

Chapter Two is the starting point, which is where you can resolve a few matters that are cosmic in nature but may affect the world. This is mainly about the nature of alignments and whether they are forces that will have an effect, but the chapter also suggests generating a particular book or books that will offer cosmic-level history when needed.

Chapter Three addresses continents and a past cataclysm, as well as a discussion about temperature zones which may be important when creating the map.

Chapter Four is an odd chapter, because a lot of the material in it is covered in greater detail elsewhere. As a procedural step, though, it's very useful. Basically, this chapter generates a few details about all the "other" continents that aren't starting points. This information is very useful when building the home continent, because it gives you information about the far-away influences that affect the home continent.

Chapter Five is the main course for creating the home continent. In this chapter, you create cultures with their borders to other cultures (those borders mostly being the wilderness areas of the world). The culture's political organizations are defined, together with historical turning points, religion, and many other cultural-level details.

Chapter Six focuses on countries. You will already have information about the culture at this point, but this is where you can generate population numbers and lots of other detail at a country-by-country level.

Chapter Seven brings us back to the wilderness. You may already have dipped into this chapter while generating borders, but this chapter lets you create themes and situations that exist in the wilderness rather than in civilization.

Chapter Eight addresses international groups and conspiracies that may affect the world.

Chapter Nine and onward are basically reference chapters used to fill in different types of detail when you begin fleshing out the world. Chapter Nine is about Legendary Locations, a result that is "called" by many of the tables in preceding chapters.

Chapter Ten is about cities and settlements, containing various tables that will be helpful when you reach this level of detailing the world.

Chapter Eleven is about Deities and Religion, a chapter referenced numerous times in Chapters Two through Eight.

Chapter Twelve is about the big personalities you'll need to bring life to the world.

Chapter Thirteen is about mythical places that are mostly located in other planes of existence but are needed for mythologies and the occasional "dialed-to-eleven" sort of location.

Chapter Fourteen is about Monstrous Leaders, who are invoked in many of the world-generation tables.

Finally, **Chapter Fifteen** contains various useful facts that didn't really fit into the rest of the book. Most of this is real-world data and information.

GENRES AND APPROACHES

In several places in the book there are references to particular types of worlds based on different fantasy genres. These are Sword & Sorcery, Heavy Metal, Grim & Gritty (also occasionally called "Grimdark"), and High Fantasy. Clearly, there is a lot of overlap between these genres, and defining them is highly subjective.

SWORD & SORCERY

Sword & Sorcery is pulp fantasy fiction, in which the protagonists may be anti-heroes and in which there may be science fiction elements blended in with the fantasy. If you're trying to emulate this sort of fiction, one of the driving forces is encountering strange and varied cultures along the journey.

- Strange and varied cultures. This book is already designed to create a lot of cultural variation, but if a sword & sorcery campaign is your goal, you may want to fudge die rolls and direct your creativity in the general direction of big, weird differences between countries.
- Science fiction elements aren't required, but don't shy away from them.

HEAVY METAL

Heavy Metal is fantasy dialed up to eleven, in a world where there are many unexplained (and unexplainable) mysteries about the nature of reality. Other than the fact that science fiction elements aren't necessarily out of place in this sort of world, it's almost a sub-genre of high fantasy in which the world is wilder and the villains more evil. Lord of the Rings, while it's virtually the definition of high fantasy, is also very much in line with a heavy metal ethos.

- Prophesies. Prophesies are a big deal, although they can be turned aside. Consider prophesies to be like a "high chance of likelihood," so the characters can change the course of events. Lean hard into the Legendary Book concept in Chapter Two. Create some future events that have been "foreseen."
- Everything Strange is Bigger than Life. This is more a matter of how you describe things, but you'll find that the Heavy Metal tables have a tendency toward bigger cities as one example. If you're looking for a default approach, if in doubt, do it the way the Conan comic books would have done it.
- Lots of Wilderness. This follows the idea that life is filled with mystery, and it's reflected in the wilderness. Only a small portion of the world is truly civilized, and these areas are probably separated from each other by wild lands. Much has been lost, and much has been forgotten.

GRIM & GRITTY

Grim & Gritty is fantasy in a world where there aren't many forces of good, if any. Humankind is just clawing out an existence in a hostile world with little in the way of nobility. The Black Company by Glen Cook is a good example of the fiction behind this mode of play. A word of warning: at least in my experience, campaigns that try to focus on this type of setting don't last very long. It's fun for a short time, but it can get old very quickly. A sword & sorcery campaign in which the NPCs are greedy and self-centered but where the approach is essentially lighthearted will have much better longevity than a campaign where the dirt and reality are too heavyhanded.

What does work, though, is a grim and gritty world where the characters actually can and do make a difference. This is basically a heroic campaign set in a particularly grim world, which is a very workable combination.

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Forbidden Knowledge
Seen through the eyes of bats
A Parakeet
Negotiations between the nobility and municipal leaders
The effect of an assassination
A Pact of Swords
A Bank on the Verge of Collapse
The Baron's Gambit
Influence of the Demon Princes
Forests
The Saint's Key
The Goddess of Orchards and Patterns
The High Chancellor was Impeached
The Jungles of Pagorthia
The Pit of Balance
A Dispute between Scribes
Annexation by trade
A Dead Tyrant
The Gnoptic Tome
Community
The map of a trade route
Legends of Death
Known for their theaters
A Missing Idol
Secret History of the Cosmic Centurions
Divine Right of Kings

The Vodharthic Pictograms
Gnomes
Greed
A Deadly Banquet
A Planar Monopoly
The Breaking of the Nobles
The Most Honorable Fraternity of Dark Chanters
Guild of Assassins
Charioteers
Hall of the Ice Crafters
Drug Trafficking
Non-Euclidean Hall of Tsul-Oom
The Whisperings of a Demon
Sharks
The Burning of Cottages
A Dispute between Warriors
The river ran dry
A Contest between Brewers
Seeds
A Silent Monk
An alliance of the Elves
The Mark of the Black Hourglass
Manticores
Oath of Vengeance
An invasion by lizard-folk
An alliance between two noble houses

- Money and Power are the Driving Forces. The only truly "good" organizations are small (and ripe for the characters to assist them in growing). Any large organization, even if it appears to be good, is corrupt to the core, misguided, or a front for something not so good.
- Poverty is Rampant. These campaigns usually emphasize that the common people are downtrodden, oppressed, and poor — this emphasizes the venal nature of the powerful. Society is often on the edge of collapse.

HIGH FANTASY

High Fantasy is not the same as high magic. It's fantasy in which the forces of good are quite powerful, although they may be opposed by even stronger forces of evil. Science fiction elements are very rare in this sort of fantasy fiction. In general, prophesies are common in high fantasy fiction, there is a cosmic plan of some kind in place (which has usually gotten derailed, so that there's a story), and supernatural forces, even if it's only a force of destiny, are in operation throughout the world.

- There is a Plan. High fantasy worlds in fiction are usually built around the idea that there is a cosmic plan, but that it has gone astray and needs to be put back on track.
- Emphasize religion and the fey. Because these worlds are highly supernatural and don't rely on technology, you'll want to emphasize the mystical, religious, moral, and supernatural forces at play. The fey, in particular, are a common element — although "magic attached to nature" is probably a better word than just "fey." It's a larger concept that nature has a powerful relation to magic.

HIGH MAGIC VS. LOW MAGIC

There has been a lot of discussion over the years about "low magic" versus "high magic" worlds, which I suspect dates back all the way to second edition D&D, when the Forgotten Realms began to replace Greyhawk as the default setting for Dungeons & Dragons. The Forgotten Realms is a relatively high magic world, where magic simply stands in for a lot of modern technology. There's the sense that any threat to civilization can be addressed by a wizard establishing contact by the magical equivalent of a telephone and recruiting the help of world-spanning organizations. Of course, evil has similar magical resources, so it's not a matter of a difference in power, it's more a matter of the communication and the coordination. The Forgotten Realms (at least in its later iterations) is a world where threats are generally addressed with a lot of coordinated, world-wide responses. Greyhawk, by contrast, has a much more Medieval feel; the countries are relatively isolated, and there's the feel that magical communication is extremely rare. The idea of a coordinated, international response to a world-spanning threat in Greyhawk is laughable. It's worthy of note that the Forgotten Realms is probably a much better extrapolation of what would happen with the D&D rules, and it would be difficult to explain why the World of Greyhawk doesn't have the same sort of communication and coordination given that AD&D is quite a high-magic game. Nevertheless, as a world setting, it's my opinion that the World of Greyhawk benefits from the fact that Gary Gygax didn't extrapolate the underlying rules of the game into the world setting. For whatever reason, the high magic level of the game doesn't creep into the feel of the world setting, and the world setting tends to benefit from that.

The tables in this book have the potential to be relatively high magic. Various interesting types of magic are proposed as the cause of many threats, opportunities, and bits of history. However, even in a low-magic world, magic at the level of politics and nations would have a significant effect. The real distinction between low magic and high magic in a game comes from the rules being used. If magic items are common, and spellcasters are common, the rules (if extrapolated) will suggest that the world should also be high magic.

So, the solution is either (1) to pick a ruleset that supports a low-magic world, or (2) to come up with a reason why a plentitude of wizards and magic items doesn't manage to transform Medieval-level communications and lack of international cooperation into a more modern-feeling world. The first level to this answer is that "it just doesn't." Since we're not novelists writing books, there doesn't need to be consistency at all levels. It's enough to just say that distrust and secrecy keep cooperation and communication from reaching modern levels (and, in fact, Gary Gygax was quite clear that wizards are very secretive; he just didn't give a good reason for it). A second level to the answer is that there's a slowly accumulating risk to the everyday use of magic. A player character wizard isn't using magic enough to suffer the risk, but a city wizard casting multiple spells per day, day in and day out, would begin to erode from the unnatural nature of the activity. This kind of explanation, which doesn't interfere with the rules, usually works like a charm, and it has the added benefit of adding a bit of a Cthulhuesque vibe to the world, plus an explanation as to why a player character wizard can't just pick up a lot of extra cash on the side by casting spells for people.

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CHAPTER TWO

COSMIC MATTERS

This book makes two assumptions about the cosmos and the multiverse.

First Assumption: The multiverse is very complex.

You can, of course, create a world with only a few deities, only a few other planes of existence, and no "other worlds," habitable moons, timelines, or alternate existences. However, creating a simple multiverse shuts down a lot of your options for adventure design. It works for writing novels, but when the objective is gaming you are better off leaving your options open with a complex set of options.

Second Assumption: The multiverse isn't well understood by people in the Material Plane of Existence, because communications from deities are extremely cryptic.

It's a feature of most fantasy roleplaying games that clerics and other religious-type characters can communicate directly with powerful beings beyond the walls of ordinary existence. But this doesn't mean that the communications are clear or easily understood. The complexity of the multiverse leads to answers that have to be phrased in metaphors and specialized vocabulary not available to the mortal receiving the answer.

The Anteater
The Luedharthic Engravings
Deepest Forests
The Swamps Unfolded Their Secrets
Pottery
An Autocrat
War-Bats
War-Hippos
A fire in the banquet hall
Sea Serpents
A Contest of Clothiers
Ants
A giant moth
A Dispute between Scholars
The Tsoldrashic Mysteries
War of the Air Temples
Tower of the Lunar Drum
Castle of the Howling King
Fools
The effect of a sunset
Certain people bear the mark
Lies and Mendacity
A Dead King
The Coffee Trade
The Tribunal of the Prince
Destruction
Fur traders

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Travel to a Weird Moon
An alliance between the religious leadership and a criminal group
Caught a plague that didn't kill many of the gods. Bad luck.
Lost at sea
Banner of Three Circles
Bearing the Sigil of a Gray Snake
Nihilism
A Dispute between Rangers
Coronation of the Sphinx
Mining Activity
The Tribunal of Prisoners
Scarab beetles
Ancient Scripture
The Judgement of Adu Tir
Insignia of a White Axe
Labor Riots
An Alliance of Shoemakers
Emergence of a new cult
Dreams
Rise of the Constructs
Egrets
The Ioragorda Forest
Tension between a temple and a powerful merchant
Sacrifice of Clay Figures

From the gaming perspective this is important because it limits the knowledge available to the players, but it's important for the worldbuilding side of things as well. By making the priesthoods and nations of the world rely on cryptic, oracular information, there's room for misunderstandings and disagreements which drive religious controversy among cultures. This cryptic information from the beyond helps to create cultural differentiation, which makes the world an interesting place for characters to explore.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before we start with the world, let's start by generating (or deciding upon) a couple of basic matters about the cosmos. It's usually not a good idea to set cosmic facts in stone until you have to, but these are questions that will affect countries, temples, and religions in the world, so some basic idea of how you're eventually going to develop the multiverse (when the characters reach higher level) can be useful.

Is There a Creator Deity Responsible for this World?

The Creator Deity of a world needn't be the creator of the entire multiverse; several deities might be out there creating worlds. If the answer is yes, then there is a section of this chapter on Creator Deities, because they tend to be different than the "ordinary" deities who grant spells and interact with worshippers in fantasy worlds.

Is There a Hierarchy of Gods/Forces in the Multiverse?

The hierarchies of power in the multiverse can affect the relationships of temples, religions, and countries in the world, which is why it's potentially useful to create an outline before beginning world creation. Hierarchy doesn't mean a division between "greater" or "lesser" gods, which isn't really important for world building. It means the arrangement of the following categories of beings (and whether the multiverse even contains such beings):

- Cosmic Forces Linked to Alignment, such as Law, Evil, or Lawful Evil
- Creator Deity of the Multiverse
- Lesser Creator Deities who create Worlds
- Deities that Cannot be Worshipped by Mortals
- Ordinary Deities with Whom Mortals Interact
- Deities that Reside in the Material Plane of Existence

COSMIC FORCES LINKED TO ALIGNMENT

Most fantasy roleplaying games include a moral alignment of some kind, usually involving three points (Law, Chaos, and Neutrality on one hand, or Good, Evil, and Neutrality on the other) or involving nine points (combining these into True Neutral, Lawful Good, Lawful Evil, etc.). It's usually not clear whether these alignments are simply moral categories describing a deity's or person's morality, or whether they are independent cosmic forces that influence and possibly even empower the gods.

If they are actual cosmic forces, then they are something quite distinct from the gods, and are probably more powerful than the gods, at least in certain ways. This is probably the baseline assumption of games such as Dungeons & Dragons, since many planes of existence are alignment-linked but apparently weren't created by any of the deities residing in them.

It's also possible that only a subset of the alignments are actually cosmic forces. For example, even if you're playing with all nine alignments, it might be that only Law, Chaos and Neutrality are actual cosmic forces, or only Good, Evil, and Neutrality. This could be pared down to Law and Chaos, with Neutrality being simply an absence of one of those two, or to Good and Evil.

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Significance of Whether Alignments are Cosmic Forces. Whether or not the alignments are actually cosmic forces is mostly a matter of nuance, especially when you're focusing on the Material Plane and not engaging in high-level planar adventures. It does create interesting situations, increases complexity, and opens the door to "strange bedfellows" roleplaying.

Significance of How Many Alignments are Cosmic Forces. The more cosmic forces there are, the less people have to compromise, which can reduce both roleplaying and political complexity in a game world. Here's what I mean: in a multiverse where only Good and Evil are cosmic forces, there will be cosmic-level pressure for people who are Lawful Good to work with people who are Chaotic Good. If all nine alignments are cosmic forces, then these alliances aren't pressured by the supernatural. Lawful Good people would only work with Chaotic Good people when it suits them, to support their own goals. It's very different when people make a distinction between Lawful Good and Chaotic Good, *but the universe doesn't recognize or support that distinction*.

There are pluses and minuses to using fewer than all of the alignments as cosmic forces and leaving some of them just to be the moral irrelevancies of mortal kind. The plus is as mentioned above; it adds complexity to the world and to roleplaying. The minus is that your players are going to begin with the assumption that all alignments are created equal, and you'll have to communicate that added nuance: all the Lawful alignments are the same in the eyes of the multiverse, and there is cosmic and divine pressure for angels to work alongside devils in some contexts (as one example). If you play B/X or OD&D with a three-alignment system, it's easier, but the same comment applies if you're taking Neutrality out as a cosmic force and leaving only two cosmic forces behind a three-alignment system.

CREATOR DEITY OF THE MULTIVERSE

This being, if there is one, creates everything else. One of the things it can create is Alignment-Linked Cosmic Forces, or even an Intermediate Creator Deity. There doesn't need to be a Creator Deity. The multiverse can come into being in other ways, including a random cosmic event or from the opposition of pre-existing Alignment-Linked Cosmic Forces.

LESSER CREATOR DEITIES WHO CREATE WORLDS

This basically creates two classes of deities: those who create worlds, and those who don't. It's not a distinction that will affect world-building very much. Neither choice, whether to create this distinction or not, creates significant issues, but it's useful to know ahead of time before you start worldbuilding.

DEITIES THAT CANNOT BE WORSHIPPED BY MORTALS

This isn't a major decision, and it has very little impact on your worldbuilding. However, it's useful to know because these gods can be worked into the mythology and it's a nice touch to have that "mortals must not say the name of this deity" requirement. It adds a bit of richness to the world's texture.

ORDINARY DEITIES WITH WHOM MORTALS INTERACT

Removing this category of deities can create an interesting game, but it will drastically alter the way most fantasy roleplaying games operate. It's best, usually, to assume that players won't easily accept drastic changes to what they accept. Almost the same effect can be achieved just by the assumption that communications from the gods are incredibly unclear.

DEITIES RESIDING IN THE MATERIAL PLANE OF EXISTENCE

This is actually a major decision that affects worldbuilding in a big way. Obviously there are going to be some legendary, epic creatures living in the world, and this is almost just a matter of what they're called. Is the Obsidian Dragon living in that volcano actually a god, or is it just being worshipped as a god by the kobold tribes of the area? In this book, we're calling certain super-powerful beings gods, even though they reside in the Material Plane. This is so the book embraces worlds intended to have a more ancient-era feel, allowing campaigns that are more like Jason and the Argonauts than a purely Medieval mindset. And from your perspective as the world-builder, it's only an important question — whether these beings are truly to be considered gods — when the characters reach higher level. You'll have time to think about it, and there's more discussion about this later on in the book.

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The Victorious Gladiator
A massacre in the forest
Dwarves
Decoy cargo
A Dispute between Kidnappers
Aerie of the Vengeful Sorcerer
Fur trappers
The Tribunal of Necromancers
A Pact of Ogres
A Realm in Chaos
No one was in charge
Uncharted Waters
The Iron Throne of Parebos
The Uoptic Plays
Insects ate the crops
Dispute over a range of hills
Tension of urban mobs with a particular wizard
The Mnexamic Remnants
Fall of Civilization
A plague of insects
Siege of a City
Den of the Opium Guild
A rising storm
A Dispute between Kings
Masquerading as the Queen