TALES FROM THE INFINITE STAIRCASE

Being a Collection of Adventures in which Player Characters may explore the Wonders of the Multiverse.

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Oh, the River Styx is a putrid stream,
Oceanus is too good for me,
Olympus takes too long to climb,
Yggdrasil is just a tree.
But the Infinite Staircase takes you there.
The Grand Old Stair goes ev’rywhere.
A few short steps will bring us home ... and fulfill our ev’ry dream.

The Infinite Staircase leads to all places. As such it provides an excellent basis for a Planescape® campaign. The Dungeon Master literally needs nothing more than this simple environment to take her game anywhere in the multiverse. Tales From the Infinite Staircase makes full use of the Stair’s interplanar reach. It allows player characters to embark on an adventure that encompasses far-flung locales throughout the planes without worrying about the mode of travel. This means that players unfamiliar with the Planescape milieu, who don’t know the ins and outs of portals, conduits and whatnot, can still get a feel for all reaches of the vast multiverse that the Planescape setting offers. Using the adventures presented here together might be a good way to introduce new players to the setting.

Yet, because of the way the eight adventures in the hook are presented, a DM is free to pick and choose from them and use only those that she wants. Tales From the Infinite Staircase is nothing if not flexible.

No place is perfect. If perfection were achieved throughout the multiverse, adventurers and planewalkers would have nothing to do.

Even the lillendi, who live in the beautiful and magical realm of the Gates of the Moon, the domain of the moon goddess Selûne, have their troubles. The lillendi watch over the Infinite Staircase, which grounds itself in Selûne’s palace on nights with a full moon. The lillendi favor song, dance, and art over all else. They are beings of creativity and new endeavor. Due to their link with the Infinite Staircase (which leads to all places where the creative process is the strongest and thus to all locales where intelligent creatures reside), the lillendi have sensed that a dismal shadow has begun to fall over various portions of the multiverse. This malady seems to be striking randomly throughout the planes, but where it does, inspiration, motivation, and innovation die.

While not a threat of the magnitude of a Blood War invasion, it has the lillendi worried about what it portends for the future.

The course of the adventure takes the player characters to some of the locales in which the lillendi have sensed this occurrence (which they call the Iron Shadow). The characters can travel to any of them in any order but they soon discover that the places are linked and the spread of Iron Shadow isn’t random at all. During their forays they might discover a remedy that can fight the Shadow’s influence; they may also discover the identities of some of those who seek to spread it. Once armed with such knowledge, the characters can halt any deliberate spread of the Shadow. The PCs also come across victims of the Iron Shadow and must cope with other threats and problems that arise as they investigate the situation.
USING THESE ADVENTURES

Tales From the Infinite Staircase is an anthology of short adventures. Like other adventure anthologies, notably Well of Worlds and The Great Modron March, these scenarios can be inserted into an existing campaign as the DM wishes. Further, the DM can pick and choose which adventures she wishes to use and which are inappropriate for her game. However, unlike Well of Worlds, the adventures in Tales From the Infinite Staircase can be linked together with a single plotline and theme and unlike The Great Modron March, they can be played in any order.

More information on many of the monsters and places mentioned in these adventures can be found in the Planescape Monstrous Compendiums and the various products of Planescape source material (specifically Planes of Law, Planes of Chaos, and A Guide to the Astral Plane). If a DM unfamiliar with Planescape wants to consult a single source for information on the setting, the campaign setting boxed set (TSR product number 2600) or even simply the Planewalker’s Handbook (TSR product number 2620) will probably suffice. However, this product is designed with DMs and players completely new to the Planescape setting in mind—no other products are needed at all!

PLANESCAPE ADVENTURES

For those DMs with little or no experience in running Planescape adventures, there are a few things to keep in mind. These scenarios usually run a little differently than many other role-playing adventures, and are certainly different from a dungeon crawl. That’s not to say that a body won’t partake of a dungeon crawl on the planes (or that there’s anything wrong with dungeon crawls), but it certainly won’t be standard.

Smart players know that bashing everything in sight is not the way to get ahead on the planes. ‘Cause there’s always something out there, no matter how powerful a character is, that’s going to be able to bash back harder. Fiends, aasimon, slaadi... the list of powerful foes on the planes goes on and on. They’re not a bunch to mess with just for the sake of battle. Planewalking (adventuring on the planes) is for those ready to think or talk their way out of a situation as well as fight. In fact, a good rule of thumb is this—if a body finds herself having to fight her way out of Gehenna with dozens of yugoloths screaming for her blood, chances are pretty good that somewhere, somehow, she did something wrong.

Likewise, DMs should always design and run adventures so that there’s a way for a blood (a powerful, experienced character) to get out of trouble if she bashes and uses her wits—and maybe a little charm. This doesn’t mean things have to be easy, but let’s face it, no adventurer can be expected to fight off an army of githyanki, and on the planes, such an encounter is possible.

Further, the mood in a Planescape adventure is very important. Nothing should be exactly as it seems. Planewalkers need to keep an open mind about everyone and everything. Enemies could be at any and every turn—but so could allies if a basher plays her cards right. Nothing’s cut-and-dried, nothing’s black-and-white. One minute a planewalker could be fighting against the baatezu—the next, for them against their foes, the tanar’ri.

For a planewalker, it matters less who and what a cutter is than what she believes. Events on the planes are governed as much or more by belief than anything else. Belief literally is power. It’s also what holds everything together. The factions of Sigil are among the most important organizations on all the planes, and they are based around beliefs—big beliefs, like those regarding how the multiverse works and the big “why?” of everything. Factions, both as allies and enemies, are always important in virtually any adventure on the planes, but they are also important because membership and adherence to their tenets may dictate (or at least sway) the actions of the planewalkers.

Finally, don’t forget the importance of Sigil, the City of Doors (also called The Cage). Even though no adventures in this book take place there, it still is the most obvious place for planewalkers to base themselves. It’s here, in the city that’s said to be at the center of everything, that one can find the current chant (rumors or information), a wide selection of equipment, important contacts and allies, and just about everything else a planewalker needs. Additionally, with all the portals found there, it offers transport to virtually any place the PCs need to go. DMs might encourage players to have their characters establish permanent or semi-permanent homes (kips) there. Many of the adventures in this and other Planescape products are written with the idea that the characters hail from Sigil. The Cage is where the action is—or at least the best place to hear about it.
**PREPARING FOR PLAY**

One of the hardest, but most important, jobs for the DM is matching the difficulty of the adventure to the power of the characters. Each scenario in *Tales From the Infinite Staircase* was designed for a particular level of PC ability, but if the characters being used are of higher or lower level (or PCs who are extra-tough or weak for their level) the DM has to do some modification. Likewise, changes are in order if the characters are fewer or greater in number than average. While everyone who has run published adventures is familiar with this process, it's still tricky sometimes. Many of the scenarios contain notes to assist the DM with the task.

Just simply increasing or decreasing the number of enemies the PCs face isn't always a satisfactory way to adjust the challenges they meet. DMs will find the three *Planescape Monstrous Compendium* Appendices very valuable resources in expanding the adventures with alternate foes of a different—and hopefully more appropriate—power level. Sometimes, however, the course of the adventure must be altered to accommodate the level of the PCs. Cannily DMs remember that an iron door that is an impenetrable barrier to low-level planewalkers is a negligible irritation to high-level bloods. Likewise, while a high-up wizard might be able to read a foe's mind, low-level cutters are going to have to ask for information nicely. In short, the DM should be aware of differences in power beyond just tougher or easier monsters to fight.

**ADVENTURE FORMAT**

Each adventure begins with a few sections to make using it easier. The first, the Overview, condenses the action and setup of the adventure (and how it is likely to progress) into a few paragraphs as a summary for the DM. The next section, Adventure Notes, contains information on how events in the other Tales can have an impact on the events in the Tale the DM is about to read.

Each of these notes is presented as an "if/then" statement. If the condition described is met, then the effects resulting from that condition take place in the manner described. Sometimes, the effects have multiple layers; that is to say "if condition X occurs in Tale 2, and condition Y occurs in Tale 4, then such-and-such happens."

Each adventure also has a section detailing the modifications that the plane enforces upon those in its confines, particularly upon magic. Note that the restrictions listed affect wizards and magical items, but not priest spells unless stated otherwise. In general, the DM should keep in mind that while on the Outer Planes, no summoning from or connections to the Inner Planes or the Ethereal is possible, while on the Inner Planes, summoning and connections with the Outer and Astral Planes are impossible.

Also, all clerics lose one spellcasting level for each plane that lies between the plane that they currently occupy and the one upon which their deity normally resides. For purposes of "counting" planes, on the Outer Planes the DM counts around the Great Ring of the planes, not across the Outlands or the Astral (which lie at its center). See the *Planescape Campaign Setting* or the Planewalker's Handbook for more details if desired, although all the DM and players really need to know can be found in the adventure. The DM should feel free to discount any of the alterations she feels are too strict or inappropriate to the flavor of her campaign.

**NONPLAYER CHARACTERS**

While some NPCs and monsters receive full-blown write-ups, minor NPCs in this book get only a one-line entry to give the DM the basics. These are presented as follows: Character name or title (Origin*/gender** and race/class and level***/faction if any/alignment).

* Prime (Pr), Planar (Pl), Petitioner (Pe), Proxy (Px)
** Male (m), Female (f), Genderless (0)
*** A letter indicates class as noted below. A number indicates the character's level. So, a F2, T3 is a multiclassed 2nd-level fighter and 3rd-level thief.

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**THE ORDER OF THE TALES, OR LACK THEREOF**

The options involved in allowing the scenarios (sometimes called Tales here) to be run in any order and yet maintain a consistent over-arching plot require some special attention, but the payoff is most likely worth the effort. The ability to run the adventures in any order truly lends itself to a non-linear plot line. There is no set course for the flow of play—players have the freedom to choose to go wherever and do whatever they wish.

To help the DM and to make the flexible plot work, each of the seven Tales presented after the first one has a set of conditions listed at the beginning. The conditions pertain to events that may or may not have occurred in previously played Tales. If these conditions are met, the current Tale might be changed in a small way (and sometimes in a big way). Because of the changes that can occur to one adventure based on activities conducted in another, it is quite possible that PCs can travel to the location of one scenario, play through that Tale as well as a few others, and then return to the same location to find things altered—possibly allowing for further play.

The concept of stages helps the DM organize the Tales. For purposes of *Tales From the Infinite Staircase*, the stage is the way of expressing the number of Tales a gaming group has played. The first stage is always Planewalkers, the first Tale. After that point, however, which Tale fits into which stage can vary. The Lord of Worms might be stage two if the players decided to go there after leaving the Staircase, but In Disarray would be stage two if they go to Limbo instead.