THE REALMSPHERES

The Mortal Realms are vast beyond the ken of the human mind. They are near infinite in scope, their edges defined only by their lethality. Not even the gods themselves can claim to know every aspect of their grandeur. Yet there are some lands and nations where civilisation has begun to find purchase once more.

In the oral histories and cave paintings of the wilderness tribes, the Mortal Realms may be portrayed as round stones on a frozen lake, open maws holding the lands between their teeth, or even stars flattened by the club of some celestial behemoth. In the annals of Azyr, however, they are depicted by astrocartographers as disc-like masses within vast spheres of energy.

Regardless of their representation, each realm is rich in one of the eight kinds of magical energy native to the cosmos. At the Realm's Core, this energy is stable. A measure of order can be found there, should a region free of the taint of Chaos be won from the wild tribes. Animals can be domesticated and fields farmed, bread baked and corn shucked without too much danger arising from the land itself. The export of such goods means that the Realm's Core is the breadbasket of the further-flung regions, where life is a constant struggle for survival. On the frontier, not a day goes past without violence, and the only law is that of the blade.

The closer one gets to the Realm's Edge, the more intense and chaotic it gets, to the point that to take even one more step is suicide. Known as the Perimeter Inimical, it is here that a mortal, perhaps striving to harness the wealth of magical power in these far-flung reaches, will be so badly affected by the ambient magic that they are obliterated by it. Although usually depicted as ring-shaped, in truth, the Realm's Edge is the limit of the realmsphere in all directions; should one ascend far enough – and there are Lumineth aelves who have done just this in the name of enlightenment – the result would be just as fatal. Out on the Realm's Edge, raw magic can be seen shimmering in the air; even a curse spoken in jest can kill a man, and a careless sweep of the arm can send bolts of energy crackling all around. Each perimeter is defined by the nature of the realm. For instance, the edge of Aqshy is more like flaming pumice than earth, and to stray too far is to burn alive, transform into a pillar of ash or become a candle-thing of slopping, bubbling wax.

The lands of the Eight Realms are linked, within themselves as well as to one another, by magical portals known as realmgates. Their origins are lost to the aeons. A great many have been ravaged by the Ruinous Powers, so much so that some lead straight into the otherworldly hellscapes known collectively as the Realm of Chaos.