



MORE PLANAR TOUCHSTONES

A Web Enhancement for
the *Planar Handbook*

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The *Planar Handbook* describes extraplanar locations suffused with the power of all existence that are known as planar touchstones. Characters linked to these natural hubs of planar activity can tap their power for personal use, gaining abilities that reflect the nature of the specific locations. But gaining power from the planes is not without risk, and those wishing to exploit their planar connections to the utmost must brave the dangers of the touchstones with which they are linked.

Dozens of planar touchstones are described in the *Planar Handbook*, complete with abilities gained and specific perils of the locations. Now designers Bruce Cordell, Gwendolyn Kestrel, JD Wiker, and Skip Williams offer four additional planar touchstones for plane-hopping PCs to exploit.


PLANAR TOUCHSTONES

The cosmological association of linked planes, demiplanes, and connected dimensional realms creates a vast network through which the energy of existence itself is channeled. Less-connected planes and demiplanes are the nodes of this network, and the most highly connected planes are the hubs. These hubs, known as planar touchstones, are usually suffused with excess energy by virtue of their numerous connections. Thus, many of them are legendary sites of power, or at least places resonant with mythic possibility.

The Planar Touchstone feat described in the *Planar Handbook* allows a character who possesses a portable object native to a given touchstone to forge a link with it. Such a linkage grants the character a base ability that is always active. A personal visit to the touchstone site discharges its inherent power directly into the linked character, granting her a higher-order ability that she can call upon a limited number of times. Additional visits to that planar touchstone can revitalize this charge, restoring the number of available uses of the ability to maximum.

If a character with the Planar Touchstone feat visits a touchstone other than the one to which she is linked, the base ability of the new site replaces that of the old one. In like manner, the character immediately gains the higher-order ability of the new site and loses any remaining uses of the one corresponding to the old site. Characters intimately familiar with planar touchstones often refer to visiting multiple such sites as “taking the touchstone tour.”

In addition to conferring benefits on characters, planar touchstone sites can serve as story elements for campaigns. For instance, a prophecy might state that a



particular scourge can be overcome only by “one who looks upon the stars of Oxyrhynchus” (see *Planar Handbook*, page 172). On a less dramatic scale, planar touchstones also make great alternatives to treasure—when characters overcome a particularly difficult threat associated with a touchstone site, the higher-order ability gained makes a good reward.

WHAT MAKES A TOUCHSTONE?

A touchstone site is often special in some way that goes beyond its status as a hub of the cosmological network. Relatively few touchstones exist on the Material Plane, but almost every one of them has historical or geographical importance, or is significant for some other reason besides its cosmological status. For example, one Material Plane touchstone is the peak of the world’s tallest mountain.

Planar locations previously described in other game products might also be considered planar touchstones. Adventurers might have known about and even visited such a site several times without ever realizing that it had the power to confer special abilities. Determining the base and higher-order abilities conferred by these sites is an exercise for the DM (see the Behind the Curtain sidebar on page 154 of the *Planar Handbook* for instructions on creating touchstone abilities.)

Some very powerful characters eventually gain the ability to create small demiplanes. Such fledgling locations can never be planar touchstones, but after several thousand years of growth, linkage, and expansion, such a created plane could become host to one or more planar touchstones.

TRAVELING TO TOUCHSTONE SITES

A character who lacks the ability to visit a touchstone site cannot access the higher-order ability inherent to it. Thus, anyone who wishes to take the Planar Touchstone feat and forge a link to a particular planar location should possess a reliable method of reaching it. Perhaps the character knows of a permanent portal that opens near the touchstone, or has access to spells such as *plane shift*, either personally or via a friend. Whatever the method of transportation, the character must have access to a method that is at least somewhat reliable.

But reaching the planar touchstone is the only first step. Some planar touchstones have environments that are inimical to nonnative life. In particular, elemental planes require some preparation because of their energy-dominant traits. For instance, the planar touchstone location called the Burning Rift (see the *Planar Handbook*) is located on the Elemental Plane of Fire.

Unless a linked character arranges for proper protection, his visit to this touchstone may be short.

TOUCHSTONES ON THE PLANES

The following section offers four new planar touchstone locations. Each of these sites is described in the following format.

Name: The most common name or names of the planar touchstone are given in this entry.

Description: Each location has a description that details its appearance and general conditions.

Location: This entry provides the planar location of the touchstone, if known. The major planes of existence are described starting on page 151 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*. Refer to those descriptions for details, especially when a character must travel through some of the intervening planar locations before arriving at the touchstone.

Initial Encounters: This entry offers information on the type of encounters that characters may face on their first visit to the touchstone. An encounter table is provided, if appropriate.

Subsequent Encounters: Information on the type of encounters characters may face on subsequent visits to the touchstone is given here.

Base Ability: This entry describes the base ability gained by a character who takes the Planar Touchstone feat and links to this site. This ability is always available to the character (to the limits of any supernatural ability) and has unlimited uses.

Recharge Condition: Many planar touchstones require not only a visit, but also the fulfillment of some condition in order to recharge the higher-order ability it confers. The linked character need not fulfill this condition to gain the planar touchstone’s base ability, but she must do so each time she recharges the higher-order ability.

Higher-Order Ability: A character with the Planar Touchstone feat who visits the touchstone and fulfills its recharge condition gains this ability. It can be used a limited number of times before recharging, which requires another visit to the touchstone and fulfillment of its recharge condition. All higher-order abilities are considered either supernatural or spell-like, as indicated in the individual descriptions. Each such ability is usable only once per day.

Higher-Order Uses: Each time the character recharges her higher-order ability, she brings her remaining uses of it up to this number.

THE BLEAK TOWER (EL 13)

Ages ago, a powerful lich created a swampy demiplane in which to build her stronghold—a single obsidian structure known as the Bleak Tower. Although the bog seemed to surround the tower for miles in every direction, the plane was really only 1 mile in diameter. The lich made the plane self-contained so that no one who entered could move very far from her clutches.

For centuries the lich remained in her tower, researching new and innovative ways to turn dead flesh into undead servants. Whenever she needed new subjects for her experiments, she opened a portal from her demiplane to some other place in the multiverse. The creatures pulled into the swampy plane through such portals were never seen again—at least not in any recognizable form.

No one knows what happened to the lich, but she has not been seen or heard from in millennia. The demiplane's boundaries have grown so weak that it periodically breaches them, spilling into swampy regions of other planes. When such a tear occurs, the Bleak Tower beckons to all the undead in the region, augmenting its own forces.

Location: A nameless demiplane.

Initial Encounters: Roll on the Bleak Tower Encounter Table below when the characters visit the site for the first time, or for the first time in more than a year.

BLEAK TOWER ENCOUNTER TABLE

d%	Encounter
01–20	1 dread wraith
21–35	6 balor skeletons*
36–60	1 lich
61–85	1 elite vampire, 13th-level half-elf monk/shadowdancer
86–100	1 mature adult black dragon

Subsequent Encounters: Once the characters clear out the area, the chance of an encounter is only 25% on each subsequent visit. If the PCs fail to visit the location for more than a year, they must roll for encounters as if they had never visited the site.

Base Ability: You gain a +1 bonus on all Fortitude saving throws.

Recharge Condition: Walk across the demiplane, beginning at the entrance to the Bleak Tower and walking away in a straight line until you arrive at the entrance again. Traversing the demiplane in this manner is possible because it is self-contained. While walking, you have a 50% chance of having an encounter, in addition to any encounters that may occur as a result of your arrival on the demiplane.

Higher-Order Ability: Once per day, you may use *inflict serious wounds* (caster level 10th) as a spell-like ability.

Higher-Order Uses: 5.

***Balor Skeleton:** CR 8; Large undead; HD 20d12; hp 130; Init +12; Spd 40 ft.; AC 19, touch 17, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +10; Grp +26; Atk +21 melee (1d10+12, slam) or +21 melee (1d6+12, claw) or +14 melee (1d8+13/19–20, +1 vorpal longsword); Full Atk +21 melee (1d10+12, 2 slams) or +21 melee (1d6+12, 2 claws) or +14/+9 melee (1d8+13/19–20, +1 vorpal longsword) and +22 melee (1d2+1 plus 1d6 fire, +1 flaming whip); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SQ damage reduction 5/bludgeoning, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, undead traits; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +14, Will +12; Str 35, Dex 27, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1.

Skills and Feats: Hide +4, Jump +16, Listen +8, Spot +8; Improved Initiative(B).

Undead Traits: A balor skeleton is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. It is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage to its physical ability scores, ability drain, energy drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or death from massive damage. It cannot be *raised*, and *resurrection* works only if it is willing.

Possessions: None.

THE CUSP OF THE TRYST (EL 14)

The 148th layer of the Abyss is a rocky, wind-blasted plain named Torrent. Dark blue and green clouds roil endlessly through the sky, and bolts of lightning strike the ground incessantly. Only creatures made of lightning—or those with immunity to its effects—can live in this dismal place.

Any creature standing on the surface of Torrent will eventually be struck by lightning. The inhabitants consider such an event joyous—a sensual joining between the sky and the earth via the body of a fortunate intermediary. Most visitors, however, have no such romantic notions about several million volts of electricity coursing through their bodies.

The tallest point on Torrent is a relatively small mountain that the locals call the Cusp of the Tryst because it is struck by lightning more frequently than any other spot. Many of Torrent's inhabitants consider it a sacred place, and those who travel to it can enjoy the kiss of the lightning more than ten times per hour.

Location: Torrent, the 148th layer of the Abyss.

Initial Encounters: Roll on the Cusp of the Tryst Encounter Table below when the characters visit

the site for the first time, or for the first time in more than a year.

CUSP OF THE TRYST ENCOUNTER TABLE

d%	Encounter
01–15	1 young adult blue dragon
16–30	3 vrocks
31–65	1 glabrezu
66–90	3 hezrous
91–100	1 mature adult blue dragon

In addition, every 10 minutes that a group of characters remains above ground on Torrent, one of them may (25% chance) be struck by a natural lightning bolt. This chance increases to 50% every 5 minutes for characters standing atop the Cusp of the Tryst. Each of Torrent's lightning bolts deals 5d6 points of electricity damage (Reflex DC 15 half).

Subsequent Encounters: Once the characters clear out the area, the chance of an encounter is only 20% on each subsequent visit. If the PCs fail to visit the location for more than a year, they must roll for encounters as if they had never visited the site. The chance of a lightning strike does not change.

Base Ability: You gain electricity resistance 5.

Recharge Condition: Climb to the top of the Cusp of the Tryst and stand there until lightning strikes you. The lightning deals 5d6 points of electricity damage (no save).

Higher-Order Ability: Once per day as a full-round action, you can create an effect similar to that of the *lightning bolt* spell, except that it deals 1d6 points of electricity damage for every two character levels you have achieved (maximum 10d6, Reflex DC 3 + your character level).

Higher-Order Uses: 5.

THE SENTINEL GROVE (EL 9)

The towering oaks of the sentinel grove are massive and ancient even by the standards of Arborea. Many rise hundreds of feet into the air and have boles more than 20 feet across. A thick bed of moss, fallen leaves, and delicate ferns blankets the ground under these trees, except where occasional gaps in the canopy let in shafts of pure sunlight. Beds of gorgeous wildflowers thrive in such locations, filling the air with their heady perfume.

In the heart of this grove stands an ancient temple—ruined, yet still magnificent. Flowering vines twine around its stately marble columns, and within the roofless sanctuary lies a pond filled with lilies. The remains of friezes depicting epic battles between heroes and all manner of terrible foes decorate the interior walls, but

no clues reveal the identity of the deity to whom the temple was dedicated. Some say the building is simply a monument to struggle, and that it was created as a ruin to indicate the fleeting nature of glory.

Location: The first layer of Arborea.

Initial Encounters: Roll on the Sentinel Grove Encounter Table below when the characters visit the site for the first time, or for the first time in more than a year.

SENTINEL GROVE ENCOUNTER TABLE

d%	Encounter
01–15	1 celestial treant
16–30	3–5 anarchic satyrs
31–70	4–7 anarchic dryads
71–85	3–5 celestial giant eagles
86–100	3–5 celestial giant owls

Subsequent Encounters: Once the characters clear out the area, the chance of an encounter is only 50% on each subsequent visit. If the PCs fail to visit the location for more than a year, they must roll for encounters as if they had never visited the site. The creatures of the sentinel grove resent constant intrusions but are basically good-natured. They may consent to give the characters access to the grove in return for some service rather than simply fighting.

Base Ability: When standing upright on any natural terrain, you gain a +1 bonus on any opposed checks you make to resist bull rush, trip or overrun attempts, and on saving throws to resist being moved against your will (by wind effects or *telekinesis*, for example).

Recharge Condition: You must climb to the top of the tallest oak in the grove, harvest an acorn, and plant it in fertile soil. The relative heights of the trees may change from time to time because of irregularities in growth and vagaries in the weather, so a fresh determination of the correct tree is necessary with each visit.

Higher-Order Ability: Once per day, you can create a *heroes' feast* effect, as the spell (caster level equals your character level).

Higher-Order Uses: 2.

THE DEEPING POOL (EL 11)

The Deeping Pool is actually a small lake, perhaps a quarter mile wide and several miles long. It lies hidden within a broadleaf forest on Krigala, the realm of eternal day. Though the sun shines perpetually overhead, the forest's thick canopy casts the whole area in a green twilight gloom—except for the exact center of the lake, where shafts of golden light stream down and make the waters sparkle like a field of precious diamonds. The pool's depth has never been precisely determined,

perhaps because its verdant surroundings are so lovely that no one has ever bothered to do so, or perhaps because it is bottomless indeed.

The Deeping Pool is the only sizable body water for hundreds of miles in any direction. Thus, for inexperienced travelers, the forest surrounding the pool is effectively a cool, green desert. At any given hour, dozens or even hundreds of animals visit the pool to slake their thirst. Most of these visitors are harmless enough, but some come here for more than a cool drink.

Location: The first layer of the Beastlands.

Initial Encounters: Roll on the Deeping Pool Encounter Table below whenever the characters visit the site for the first time, or for the first time in more than a year.

DEEPING POOL ENCOUNTER TABLE

d%	Encounter
01–15	1 gaspar
16–30	5–8 dire wolves
31–70	6–11 giant crocodiles
71–85	1–2 dire tigers
86–100	3–6 celestial unicorns

Subsequent Encounters: The Deeping Pool serves as a watering hole for all manner of wildlife. PCs who make an effort to clear the area of monsters find it just as busy each time they visit. If they make a concerted effort to clear out the bigger predators in the area, however, treat an encounter with dire animals or giant crocodiles as no encounter during subsequent visits. If the characters don't visit for a year or more, go back to using the regular encounter table.

Base Ability: You gain a +2 bonus on all Handle Animal checks and on Survival checks made to forage for food and water.

Recharge Condition: Share a drink from the pool with an animal. To do so, you must be adjacent to an animal, and the two of you must drink from the pool at the same time. For the purpose of recharging the pool's higher-order ability, an "animal" is any creature with the animal type or the augmented animal subtype. Characters with animal companions should find meeting this condition fairly simple, but others must calm or control the animal in some fashion.

Higher-Order Ability: Once per day, you can assume one of the following animal traits for 1 minute per character level. The duration of the ability need not be consecutive minutes or rounds, and starting or suspending the effect is a standard action for you. Choose from the following traits each time you use the ability.

- Gain the low-light vision special quality.
- Gain the scent special quality.
- Increase your current natural armor bonus by +2.
- Gain a climb speed equal to the base land speed for your race (maximum 30 feet).

Higher-Order Uses: 3.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he was *Dragon Magazine's* Sage for eighteen years. Skip was a codesigner of the D&D 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden. (His borscht gets rave reviews.)