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Synopsis

Dungeons & Dragons has long been a game about exploring new places and fighting dangerous monsters. Usually these adventures are set either in an established campaign setting or a home brew world devised by the dungeon master. This variant outlines a method in which both the players and the dungeon master can create a world together, creating a new method for world creation.

Basic Rules

This method of world creation is quite simple; the dungeon master and the characters each take turns naming facts about the world, its geography, its people, its customs, and its legends. Both the dungeon master and the players are encouraged to think creatively and to place locations and legends that they're interested in exploring and examining. This is a simple process that has only a few basic rules.

- Everything Exists:

Any information found in the core rules supplements exists in the world in some fashion. No participant in this process can state a fact or legend that invalidates a choice found in the rules books. The dungeon master and the players should be able to select any rules option in the books in this campaign setting.

- The Basic Premise is True:

The basic premise of dungeons & dragons is still intact in this world. Tieflings once hailed from Bael Turath, all of the core deities exist in some fashion, and adventurers still explore dark dungeons and buy magical treasures. While individual facts about the common legends might change, the basic premise cannot be altered with stated facts (though legends can offer different options).

- No Contradictions:

Once a participant in the world building process states a fact or legend, nothing can contradict this statement. If a player states that the village of Green Hills exists in the Flowering Valley another player cannot then state that the village doesn't exist. Once someone states a fact it becomes just that: a fact. You can, however, append additional information to a stated fact. In the above example a player could state that the village of Green Hills is linked to the Feywild and that it only actually appears during the daytime, disappearing at night.

- Beware the Monkey's Paw:

While this is a cooperative world, the GM does hold ultimate power over the setting, mostly in order to ensure that the game is actually a challenge. If you state that the town well holds powerful magical items the DM can alter this fact to ensure that 1st level characters don't start off with holy avengers. Be careful what you wish for, as the DM can alter facts if they're clearly placed only to give an unfair advantage to the players.

- Be Cooperative:

This is a group exercise and as such try not to rain on someone else's parade. Work with everyone else at the table to make an enjoyable setting. If someone raises a big objection to one of your facts ask them why they object and consider meeting them halfway. While you have ultimate power on your turn you can and should talk to the other players if there's some question about your fact or legend.

Building the World

Filling in the map is an easy and enjoyable process. Simply gather your group together, grab a piece of paper, and place a dot somewhere near the middle of the paper. This is the starting village where the characters will begin their adventuring career. You can name it now or leave the name as the first stated fact of the world building process. Then elect one player as the scribe (this is usually the GM). The scribe writes down all the stated facts so that there's a written record of the world.

There are two smaller parts to the entire world building process. The first part is the phase, which is a broad category of the world building process. The phase determines what kinds of facts and legends each player can state during each round. Each round every player can name one fact or legend for that phase. Most phases consist of two to five rounds before the next phase begins.

Each round every player gets a chance to name a fact or legend appropriate to the phase subject. These statements can either be a simple word or phrase that other players can elaborate on or a one or two sentence statement. Players can make two types of statements.

A fact is something that is completely true (so long as it follows the general rules above). Examples of a fact would be the location of some terrain feature, a general truth about a race, or the name of a place or culture.

A legend is like a fact, save that the details of it can change to fit the story or the needs of the world. Legends can also simply be keywords, adventure ideas, or common beliefs of the world. Unlike facts, legends can be changed by the GM in secret to surprise the players. Examples of legends would be a story that a dungeon exists in the Sunlight Plains, that dragons cannot see people who wear their own color or that when a wizard casts a spell his eyes glow.

The Phases

While there are no hard and fast rules for how many phases are used before play begins or for how many rounds each phase contains, the general outline below will produce a vibrant and adequately detailed region suitable for adventuring.

Phase One: World Myths [2-3 Rounds]

World myths are almost universally legends rather than facts. World Myths tend to include legends about how each race was created, vast world spanning legends, and facts that everyone should know. This phase is intended to get everyone thinking about the broad theme of the world.

Phase Two: The Races [2-4 Rounds]

This phase can contain both facts and legends about equally. This phase allows the players to detail the races and how they might deviate from the core books. This phase is most useful for players who want to come from a unique culture or for players who want to ensure that a race is either common or uncommon.

Phase Three: Local Geography [3-5 Rounds]

In this phase the players begin to fill in the blank map with details about the local geography. Everyone takes turns drawing in terrain features such as mountain ranges, rivers, plains, and other such things. Players can either leave the places unnamed or given them a name that might suggest further facts.

Phase Four: The Village [2-4 Rounds]

In this phase the players begin to name facts and legends about the starting village. These can include the absence or presence of services or people, the local religion, the general feeling of the town, and other such things. This phase can be expanded if the players expect to spend a great deal of time there.

Phase Five: Local Threats & Factions [1-3 Rounds]

Once the world has been filled with a few terrain features and a local village, the players now need to place a few threats and monsters in the area. Threats are generally found in the surrounding terrain while factions are generally reserved for the starting village or for neighboring nations. Players can be quite vague here, leaving a lot of wiggle room for the GM to plan adventure around.

Phase Six: Local Legends [1-3 Rounds]

This phase is entirely limited to legends, not facts. Players should start listing common legends about places, people, and races. These are intended to give the DM ideas for story seeds and adventures, so the more evocative and vague you are the better.

Phase Seven: The World Beyond [2-4 Rounds]

During this phase the players all take turns filling out facts and details about the large world. This can be where the roads lead to, neighboring towns or villages, facts about the local nation, or even the presence of another continent. This is intended to provide locations for further adventures once the local area has been explored.

Phase Eight: Final Details [3-8 Rounds]

This final phase is intended for a catch-all where players can name a few last details about the world. No subject for facts or legends is forbidden and this phase is generally used to flesh out existing facts a bit further.

Bringing it All Together

Once all of the phases have been brought together, the DM should compile all of the information into one easy to read format. This is now the beginning of the campaign world. As play begins the DM and the players can further define the facts during play. Should the characters find themselves lost for something to do they can simple start naming more facts that the DM can use to create further adventures.

When the players finally progress beyond their home region you can go through this process once again to create a new region ripe for exploration. Simply start at phase three for the new area, keeping in mind that previous facts cannot be invalidated. In this way you create the world a little bit at a time.

Final Word

This process is far from the final word on cooperative world building, and indeed it is not even

that unique. These are simply my suggestions for the process and you should change them to better suit your own group and play style. Above all remember that building the world should be fun for everyone.