

Circus

The origins of the pocket dimension known as 'Circus' are in the process of being lost to time; there are still a few mages who remember that it was set up a thousand years ago to allow magic users to interact with each other, and the exact details are hardly a secret, but, honestly? Nobody much cares. Circus is Circus, and from the point of view of the modern generation of mages, it's unaging, ageless, and immortal.

The layout of Circus is deceptively straightforward: there is a central Hub, where those new to visiting the dimension typically appear, and there are a nigh-infinite number of Spokes, where more experienced mages can establish base camps, 'residences,' or meeting houses. Circus seems to go on more or less forever, although as a practical matter virtually all mages settle in close to the Hub. Still, there's plenty of room to build.

There are definite rules to Circus:

- The first rule is that nobody can hurt anybody else in this dimension. And 'hurt' is defined extremely loosely; many a mage has tried to get around the rule,

and nobody has yet to succeed. Mages can't restrain other mages here, either. Circus is absolutely useless as a prison.

- The second rule is that mages can't actually physically bring in, or take anything out of, Circus. Mages may shape items out of Circus's firmament -- the technique is not instinctive, but very easy to learn -- but these items stay in Circus when they leave. On the bright side, mages do not need to eat or drink while in Circus, although they do need to sleep, and they do get older. The only deaths that have ever occurred in Circus have been from old age (when a mage dies, he or she vanishes from the dimension entirely).
- The third rule is that only those who learn a particular spell may enter Circus. That typically means only experienced mages, although there have been a few exceptions to this rule -- but no passengers are allowed along for the ride. Mages can leave Circus whenever they desire.

Currently, Circus acts as a clearinghouse for information and communication between mages -- except that it also has recently begun to act as a reliable communications network between various fantasy realms, which is causing some friction. Various monarchs and bureaucracies are

perfectly ready to pay quite a bit to send a mage to Circus, where he can meet a mage from another realm. While the mages can't pass along physical information, there are various memorization techniques and spells that can be used to reliably reproduce messages. The other mage then pops back to her own nation, magically creates a copy of the original message, and hey presto! Information can be sent across a continent in minutes. Best of all, nobody can interfere with the messengers *while they are in Circus*.

This intrusion of the mundane into Circus appalls a great number of mages; but, as noted earlier, it pays extremely well. And not just in money, either. Even a mid-level mage who can access Circus will soon find himself to be a valued and respected member of the local mundane court, which makes it much easier for the mage to gather resources and send somebody else the bill for them. And everybody who can access Circus will end up at least dabbling in courier duty. Some pretend that they don't, but everybody knows somebody who needs a message passed along. It can all get surprisingly tense and exciting, even though nobody in Circus can actually hurt anybody else.

Which is not to say that nobody in Circus can *interfere* with anybody else. Oh, no. Not at all.

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