Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds Compendium

by Matt Banach

Powered by

Erick Wujcik's Diceless Role-Playing

Author's Dedication

In Memory of
Steven D. Russell
Creator, Gamer, Friend

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds Compendium

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Special Thanks: To Miranda Russell for picking up the torch and continuing to light the way the Rite way.

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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Table of Contents

Preface & Introduction 4
Brokeworld 6
Empyrea 12
The Nightmare Kingdom 19
Tetsujin Shogunate 29
Stratospheria 37
Verse Arcanum 46
Ossuary Empire 55
Megacities of Neo Neo 64
Aethersaur Island 75
The Black 85
GlimmerGloam 95
Hollow Thune 107
Dragonhearth 118
Incursion Earth 626 131
Poetica Mundi 145
Poseidon's Rapture 156
The Otherlands 168
Ring of Fire 182
INK 193
Fury 205
Yaeger Zane 217

Preface & Introduction

by Yaeger Zane

Lucien said I should write a preface.

"I don't keep a list of all my faces," I said.

"Now, Yaeger, as the most famous 'author' in all the multiverse, I'm sure you know what a preface is," he said. Even through the bad reception of the Icon, I could hear the sarcasm drip.

I got your pre-face right here, Lucien.

~ ~ ~

Parallel worlds have always fascinated me. Ever since I worked up the Power to leave the boring, played-out monotony of my home reality and break free to roam the infinitely-branching expanses of the Grand Stair, I've been amazed at the limitless variety of beasts and beauties out there. I've adventured, romanced, and hunted on thousands of Gossamer worlds, each time discovering something new and wondrous. However, the more things change the more they stay the same, and the little repetitions can be just as marvelous as the unique. It's weird seeing a familiar face on an unfamiliar world – a reflection of a lover who's never met you, or the echo of a friend you lost somewhere else. But, overall, it's good; a guy like me needs a few second chances and a re-do every once in a while.

This compendium is a collection of travelogues written by yours truly over the course of many years, in between a slew of daring exploits and thrilling adventures. I didn't have any big plan when I first started publishing these, I just thought it might be useful to write some of this stuff down. I certainly didn't expect the travelogues to be as popular as they've become. They say I'm the most widely-published author in the multiverse! Ha! Even if that's Dwimmershit, I love knowing it royally rankles my snooty critics among the Gossamer Lords. "Unscholarly," my ass. You can still find some of my first edition singletons up for sale in the Agora – crumpled folios of stapled notebook paper, parchment pamphlets bound in werewolf leather, and even a few of the ones I had to etch onto sunstone plates because everything else was bursting into flame at the time.

by Matt Banach

Steve said I should write an introduction.

"I'll try and make it entertaining," I said.

For the past few years my publisher Steve has given me carte blanche to invent and populate the infinite multiverse – the freedom to write up anything I can imagine. He's shown a lot of faith in me.

I got your introduction right here, Steve.

~ ~ ~

Parallel worlds have always fascinated me. Ever since I was a kid I've escaped from day-to-day life through games of adventure on alternate planes of existence, or fiction exploring the realms of what if, or shows where sliding between dimensions is as easy as walking around the corner. I enjoy the thrill of seeing my favorite characters reimagined in different time periods and genres – allies turned villainous, monsters redeemed as heroes, or beloved casts reset against new backdrops. I love the potential of these referential mash-ups to invoke the nostalgia of canon while simultaneously exploding the status quo. Parallel universes enable us to rewrite the past without destroying it – what happened differently in this world to make it this way? What happens now? Could *our* world turn out like this?

This compendium is a collection of all the *Gossamer Worlds* products written by me over the past two-plus years – the latest installments of my long-running and extremely satisfying working relationship with Rite Publishing. When I began writing these I was looking for something new to get into; I had just finished writing *Lost In Dream*, my first full-length novel and the longest creative project of my adult life, so the notion of doing a series of small projects for the intriguing Diceless system of *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow* was very appealing. Originally published electronically in .pdf form via various RPG websites, they ended up selling well, giving me a lot of satisfaction and Rite Publishing a nice return on a product we could churn out monthly thanks to our continued use of "reverse design," an efficient method we'd perfected through years of publishing *Faces of the Tarnished Souk.*

This is my first official collection. I picked these twenty worlds to bind together because Doors to them can all be found along a certain stretch of the Grand Stair. If you put them in order they start from the dead end of the big garbage-chute room, up through the dirty concrete stairwell, along the shattered hallway, across the invisible void, up the crystal spiral staircase, backtracking to descend through the tower of boiling brass, and finally ending in the barrow-earth catacombs. They might be in a new, different arrangement by the time you read this, but that's how I came across them.

This collection isn't about me, nor is it a history of my travels. It's about what's out there, what I've seen and heard, and a little bit of advice about some of the threats out there, should you muster up the courage to go visit these interesting little corners of the multiverse. I've tried my best to be accurate, but hey, it's me, so you should probably double-check some of this stuff before you go risking your lives or the general fate of all reality. Plus, the Grand Stair isn't nearly as constant as some idealists claim – it's a bit sneaky, always switching things around on us when nobody's looking.

I'd like to thank a few beings. Thanks to the Hanged Man for leaving that Door open. Thanks to Captain Blammo for never running out of ammo. Thanks to Mary Fair of Copper Hair for teaching me how to rhyme less-awfully. Thanks to Qatoz the Undying for trading me a box full of superpositional cats in exchange for my first manuscript. Thanks to Sigma Heisenberg for leading me on a chase across the multiverse. And thanks to Lucien for being eternally mirthless and condescending in an unintentionally encouraging way... and for being my grammar nun... and for agreeing to publish this collection despite his vehement insistence that I am a menace to knowledge itself.

Everything is possible. Go see it.
~ Yaeger Zane
The Aerie, Witch's Spine, Verse Arcanum
Year of the Minotaur +38,117 GS-u

This is the first official collection of the *Gossamer Worlds*, compiling all nineteen worlds that Rite Publishing put online plus a bonus world, Fury, available for the first time here (bringing the count of worlds up to a nice round twenty). While the basics have remained consistent, we've refined the format and expanded the content over time, thanks in large part to a lot of insightful reviews and constructive feedback. (Thanks, Endzeigeist!) For this compilation, I've also gone back and added "How To Use" sections to the earlier worlds in order to bring them in line with the trusty formula we'd adopted by the last few iterations.

This collection isn't a definitive treatment of strategically critical realities, nor is it a list of settings you "must" digest in order to understand the mysteries and meta-plot of *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow*. They're just a tiny few of the worlds scattered throughout the infinite – places to be mapped and meandered, explored and enjoyed, twisted and tweaked to suit the needs of *your* stories upon the Grand Stair. Besides, any given world probably has its own gossamer clones and reality-shadows out there, identical in nearly every respect except, perhaps, for one little detail that makes all the difference.

I'd like to thank a few people. Thanks to Jason Durall, Kit Kindred, Perry Grosshans, Rob Donoghue, Dain Lybarger, Andrew Peregrine, Matt Forbeck, Mark Knights, and every other author, editor, and contributor that has added to the phenomenally diverse and expansive setting that is *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow.* Thanks to all of the talented artists whose beautiful and imaginative work inspired these worlds. Thanks to the reviewers for every unflinching critique and every morsel of praise which gave me the grist to keep grinding these out. And thanks to Steve Russell and Rite Publishing for making it all possible and bringing us all the infinite wonder that is the multiverse.

Everything is not yet written. Go write it.
~ Matt Banach
Champaign, Illinois, USA
May 25th, 2016

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Brokeworld

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Brokeworld

Explorer (Author): Matt Banach
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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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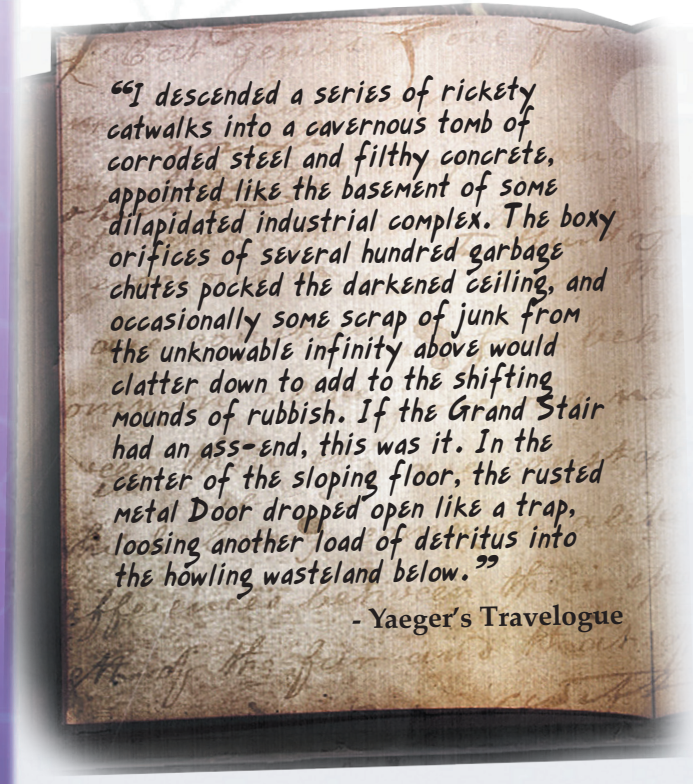


Brokeworld is a dump. The polluted, wind-blasted landscape is made up entirely of junk stretching out as far as the eye can see – scrap-littered plains, treacherously shifting hills, and gaping pits formed by sinkholes and seismic tremors. I reckon that Brokeworld probably once supported its own misfortunate civilization, but anything original to the world hasn't been seen in millennia, buried under a miles-thick crust of compacted rubbish. Somewhere far below the tunnel-riddled upper strata of refuse might be the tops of crystal skyscrapers and mountains made of solid electrum, but I don't think there's a sane soul alive willing to dig through all that crap to find them.

Either by the Grand Stair's unfathomable design or some tragic cosmic happenstance, the place long ago became a dumping ground for other Gossamer worlds, and in rare instances the Grand Stair itself. Hence, the variety of detritus coating the place is staggeringly diverse, and nearly any imaginable scrap of technology that is defective, corrupted, or damaged can be found amongst the seemingly infinite piles. I once tripped into a pile of a dozen broken syringes, a shattered pinball machine, and a fusion pistol with a breached reactor housing. Most of the stuff comes through Doors that function as garbage chutes, depositing fresh batches of the rotten at irregular intervals, but it is obvious that some things on Brokeworld are just too big to have come through that way. Somewhere there's an entire coastal city that got wiped from the face of a Gossamer world during a mysterious typhoon, only to end up stranded in Brokeworld. The entirety of the city's inhabitants – those who had survived the typhoon, that is – were eaten by gremlins within a fortnight.

Gremlins are the worst. If any group claims dominion over Brokeworld, its them, though individually they're nothing more than pests. As a phenomenon, however, they're an apocalyptic contagion. The little misshapen bastards can change their size, getting into *anything* and *everything*. The clever ones can even infest electronics, becoming contagious computer viruses of the most destructive variety. In addition to sabotaging any technology they can get their scrabbling claws on, gremlins defecate on everything, which is both utterly disgusting and genuinely dangerous. Their acidic fecal matter contains spores primed to bloom into crops of gremlin offspring, and more than one Gossamer Lord has committed the vile faux pas of tracking an infestation of gremlins into someone else's Domain because he neglected to wipe his boots.

The Unmade haunt the fresher scrapheaps, scrounging and hunting. These wretched souls were once constructs or practitioners of the Eidolon who fell from grace, lost themselves, or otherwise succumbed to Brokeworld's corrupting influence. Irreparably shattered but not quite dead, they're cursed with the obsessive hope that they can restore the perfect pattern they once knew by harvesting it from still-working material. They're wrong. What results are twisted, cannibalistic junk-golems who merely perpetuate the cycle of decay. Lesser Unmade are pathetic cyborgs and misfit toys begging for circuits and rusty gears, but the Greater Unmade can rival a Gossamer Lord – some might've been one.

Doors into or out of Brokeworld are notoriously unreliable, often shrouded or one-way, and it always seems easier to enter than to leave. Doors diverted from other locations sometimes divert to Brokeworld, either by the Grand Stair's inscrutable intent or a Master of the Grand Stair's sloppy or malicious tampering. New Doors to

Brokeworld have a tendency to appear in areas where something's been broken, whether it be a Gossamer Lord shattered in a duel or one of those rare instances when something destructive actually befalls the décor of the Grand Stair itself. Once, after a tragically ill-advised battle in a parlor-like hallway of the Grand Stair, I watched a Door appear and open on its own, taking a ruptured suit of armor, a few broken vases, and one of my shoes with it. All too often, Doors out of Brokeworld malfunction or sever themselves unless one makes a specific, deliberate effort to secure them for a return trip. However, holding a Door to Brokeworld open is also treacherous – while they do not possess the powers of a Warden or Master of the Grand Stair, gremlins have an inherent ability to pierce the veil that normally prevents inhabitants of Gossamer worlds from noticing Doors, along with the ability to pass through such Doors. Gremlins crave the opportunity to wreak havoc in bright, shiny new worlds, and some Masters of the Grand Stair make it a policy to sever any Door to Brokeworld on principle immediately, just to keep the gremlin pestilence contained.

The current primary Door to Brokeworld empties downward out of a metal trapdoor hanging from the underside of the rusty remains of an oil-drilling platform. The platform perches unsteadily on its remaining pylons atop a large hill of junk overlooking the vast expanse of Brokeworld's heaps and a nearby field of relatively fresh scrap pits prowled by the Unmade. The Gossamer Lord's name this region "The Pits" because of the common and dangerous sinkholes. One idiot once thought

he'd avoid the terrain's pitfalls by bringing along a jetpack – which worked great until the gremlins got into it and he plunged screaming into a chasm, after exploding.

Beneath the pit-fields, the gremlin warrens stretch for countless miles, riddling the crust of the entire world like the tunnels of an insane anthill. Practically designed to collapse, the warrens are a ludicrously treacherous place to tread. The gremlins know this, and make it a point to drag newly arrived treasures and potential valuables down deep, all the better to lure brave explorers into suicidal spelunking. There's a nasty rumor going around that the current embodiment of gremlin horde-chief Splintertooth has some plum Dwimmerlaik battle-engines down there with hardly a scratch on them.

Brokeworld doesn't have oceans or seas, but it does have a big wet spot. Choked with snarling shoals of rusted junk and dense patches of flotsam, the shallow cesspool is completely unnavigable but nevertheless teems with activity. Tentacled mutant monstrosities lurk in the foul fluid and amphibious gremlins prowl the jagged beaches, making cruel sport of the hapless Lesser Unmade who go there sifting for batteries and spare parts. In a rare showing of willpower and organization, a particularly powerful Greater Unmade calling himself Lord Black Saturday has recently assembled a small pirate fleet of ramshackle hovercraft and patrols the junk-shoals robbing visitors of their precious technology and spreading false hope of deliverance from their curse amongst the Unmade. I can only presume that his inevitable ruin will be spectacularly tragic.

Brokeworld is dangerous because people underestimate the pervasive power of the Umbra there. Like I said, superficially, it is a dump, and hence it is all too easy to dismiss it as a hapless garbage planet and yet brave the wasteland anyway because you need to pursue a holed-up Umbra Master or search for an artifact lost on the Grand Stair. I did finally find my lost shoe, by the way. But, Brokeworld is insidious, relentless, and utterly exemplary of the cosmic principle that everything will break down, and all designs, no matter how perfect, will crumble into chaos. Most of the examples are physical – defective technology, ruined buildings, corrupting grime – but some of the overwhelming entropic effect is intangible. Plans have a tendency to go awry there, so on any trip to Brokeworld you can bet that intelligence will be skewed, loyalties will fray, and exit strategies will fail. It's an incredibly unlucky place, and has an uncanny knack for breaking down even the most untouchable explorers.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Primitive/Other (the broken junk of infinite worlds)
Magic Level:	Magic is Known and Believed (though very few denizens practice with any skill)
Security:	Restricted Access [2 Points] (Doors malfunction and are notoriously unreliable)
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (presently unclaimed by any Gossamer Lord)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point] (only an Umbra Master can claim Brokeworld)
Influence on the Powers:	*Eidolon* – Weak *Umbra* – Powerful *Wrighting* – Blocked
Special:	Unlucky. Every day a character spends in Brokeworld, they lose one point of Good Stuff (if they have any), or gain one point of Bad Stuff (if they have Zero Stuff or Bad Stuff). This effect is temporary for Gossamer Lords, and characters revert to their "normal" quantity and quality of Stuff immediately upon leaving Brokeworld.

How to Use Brokeworld

- Brokeworld is a cracked lens through which you can view the entire multiverse. Surrounded by the decaying discards of an infinitude of worlds, a walk through Brokeworld isn't just a slog through any garbage dump, it's a chance to sift through the trash of all of existence. Take a moment to highlight the special little objects that hint at untold stories – a mangled toy meant for an alien child, a shattered mirror haunted by the reflection of a mad emperor, or the rusted head of a decapitated android who mumbles on about great wars lost in a galaxy far away.

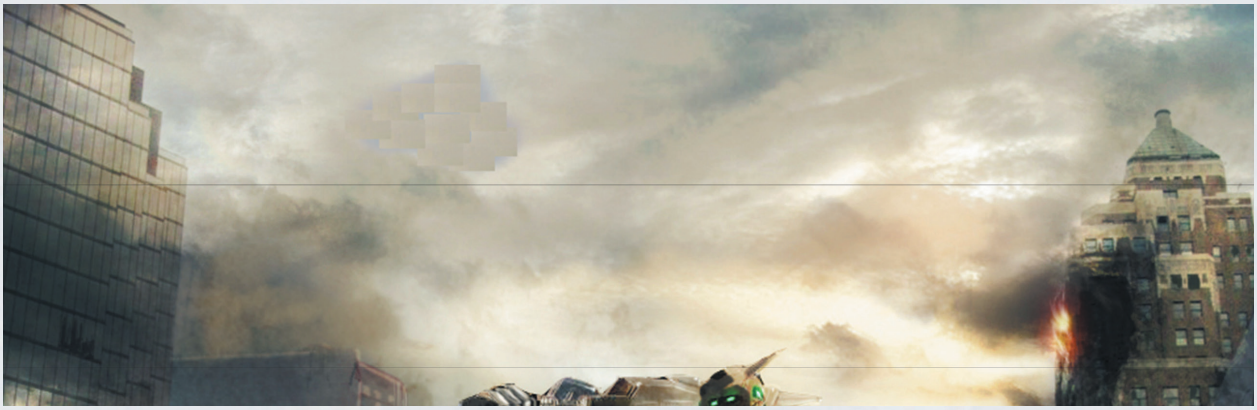
- Brokeworld is a terribly unlucky place, where even all-powerful Gossamer Lords should be subject to stumbles and mishaps. Use a visit to Brokeworld as an opportunity to remind characters of their vulnerability and fallibility as treasured equipment breaks, ingenious plans go awry, and even iron wills begin to show a little rust. Or, let the characters use Brokeworld's unforgiving entropy to their advantage to entrap and defeat an otherwise implacable foe.

- An important item (perhaps an ancient tome, or a rare Icon, or a Dwimmerlaik artifact) has been lost, and the circumstances of its disappearance from the Grand Stair suggest that the McGuffin fell down the proverbial garbage chute of the multiverse and is now buried somewhere among Brokeworld's giant mountains of crap. An adventure that begins as a simple scavenger hunt turns dangerous as Doors sever, equipment breaks, object-locating magics are on the fritz, and an army of hungry gremlins begins to swarm like piranha.

- Brokeworld can easily be entered by accident, so keep it in mind as a destination any time a Door is subject to malfunction, whether by natural happenstance or by malevolent design.

- Gremlins are universally reviled as a noxious plague up and down the Grand Stair, triggering conversations of Brokeworld in far away places. Experienced Wardens of the Grand Stair curse and check their boot heels at the merest mention of gremlins, and any character even suspected of tracking gremlin spores into an ally's domain can expect swift and emphatic condemnation. Even if a character has never been to Brokeworld, they could be falsely blamed for someone else's foul misstep, forcing them to find out "who really tracked it in" to clear their name.

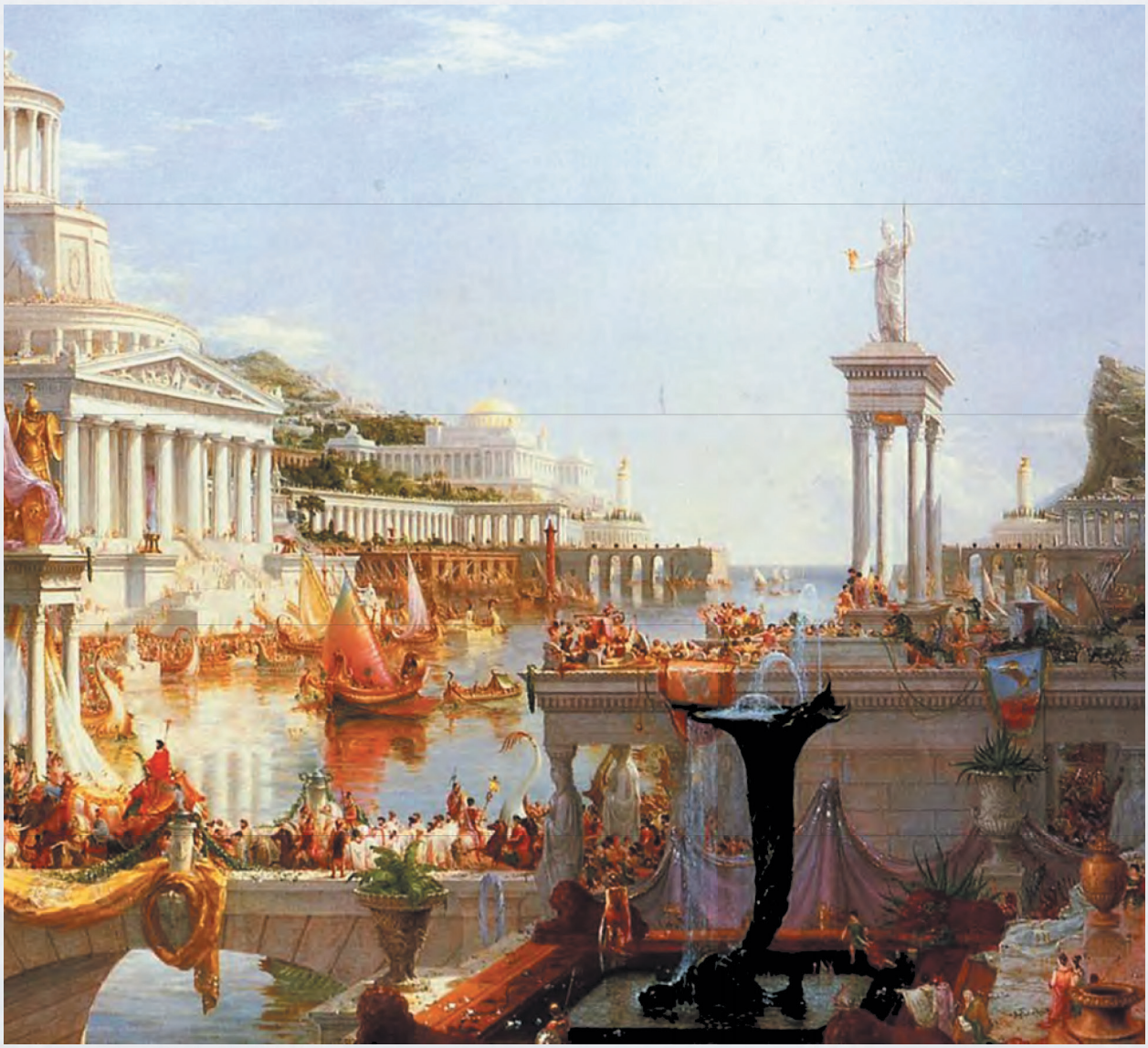
- Brokeworld is truly the ass end of existence – but that makes it a place where even the lowest of the low can make a home. Hidden among the mountains of discarded things are discarded people, like intergalactic war criminals in exile and masochistic heroes determined to punish themselves for unforgivable failures. Uncover some broken souls and learn their stories.



Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Empyrea



by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Empyrea

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Trailblazer (Interior Artist): Thomas Cole
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Pioneer (Trade Dress): James "Devin Knight" Hazelett
Lost Boy (Original Layout and Publisher): Steven D. Russell
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Special Thanks to Jason Durall for his help in developing this.

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"I came up into a large stairwell tower formed of dirty concrete and corroded metal, its ascending span of blocky steps winding upwards around a central shaft of open air, rising to a seemingly infinite height. A perpetual rumbling noise came from everywhere, like the whir of hidden machinery, joined by the faint buzzing of yellow light-bulbs set into the walls in little wire cages. The dreary surroundings hardly reflected the paradise I knew lay close by. At the first landing from the bottom of the stairwell was a clean, white-painted Door with a finely crafted golden knob. Even closed, it smelled faintly of orchids, which was a noticeable improvement from the otherwise dingy industrial surroundings. I opened the Door to glorious sunshine and the sound of laughter, and reminded myself to be wary."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

Empyrea is an Earth-like paradise at the enlightened pinnacle of a global Greco-Roman empire under the beneficent direction of their god-emperor, Allfather Augustus Bellaphon. Blending ancient stylings with advanced technology, they've really got it all – clean fusion, a healthy population, and a unified planetary government that hasn't (yet) turned upon itself. The world is not perfectly idyllic – they still have earthquakes, disease, and social unrest – but for every problem, the Allfather has a solution, be it a great spell to heal the earth, an antiviral nanite elixer, or simple words of paternal wisdom that fall with the weight of divine mandate.

Regardless of which sex you find fairer, never will you find a realm of more jaw-droppingly beautiful people. Empyreans are hale and athletic, flourishing in a society that considers peak physical fitness as essential as basic hygiene. While these lofty standards of physical beauty make some Empyreans quick to disdain or pity those plainer or weaker than themselves, they aren't shallow as rule. Mental acumen is also an Empyrean virtue; even the average citizen is well-versed in the basic sciences, and intellectual pursuits match physical sports in overall popularity. With all these advantages and a widespread drive to excel, Empyreans are truly magnificent specimens of the potential of humanity.

Superhumanity

Empyreans are physiologically human, but the many advantages of their advanced civilization and flawless genetics give them attributes considered superhuman on most other Gossamer worlds. The average adult Empyrean has Superior rank in all attributes, and the most powerful Empyreans – such as the Allfather, his direct descendants, and the world's elite Olympians – may have attributes at Paragon rank.

Empyreans' good genes are no accident. The Allfather has employed policies of positive eugenics for over two millennia, subtly (or not-so-subtly) encouraging the best and brightest to spread their desirable genetic traits throughout the global gene pool. A thousand years ago, Empyrea suffered a devastating plague which killed millions and threatened to sterilize the entire remaining population. The Allfather's miraculous sorcerous intercession averted disaster, but ever since the plague Empyreans have prayed to the Allfather to bless their couplings and grant them healthy children. This practice is no mere superstition – by his spell, Bellaphon actually managed to influence Empyreans' ability to conceive and bear offspring; while his control is not absolute and "un-blessed" babies are born in secret from time to time, the Allfather widely and purposefully uses this power to direct the progress of Empyrean humanity.

By all accounts Bellaphon has never discriminated in his selections along ethnic or racial lines (Empyrea remains a diverse society and skin tones span the rainbow without prejudice), but dissenting factions seethe at the Allfather's control over their very bloodlines and note the quiet withering over the years of those families who displease him. A few doomsayers speculate darkly about the Allfather's hand in the original plague that paved the way for this unprecedented control, though no one has ever come close to publicly accusing the sovereign of genocide, much less proving it. For the rest of modern Empyrean society, the flourishing of the

strong is simply the way it has always been, and the blessings of the Allfather have proven fruitful.

The Allfather spent his formative years in Empyrea's ancient Greece, rising to power during an imperial period with Bellaphon as caesar-for-life (and a long, long life it has been so far). Styles have evolved since then, but strong Greco-Roman influences persist world-wide: white marble columns adorn prominent buildings, strappy sandals are always fashionable, and people wear traditional tunics and togas for ceremonies and special occasions. Their preferred luxuries tend towards the traditional as well: Empyrean wines are phenomenal, the food is to die for, and attitudes towards sex are deliciously liberal. As a guy who's literally partied all across the multiverse, I can tell you without a doubt that an Empyrean *bacchanal* is an indulgence worthy of any Gossamer Lord.

Classical stylings blend surprisingly well with the world's futuristic technology, as Empyreans enjoy their gizmos but prefer them integrated seamlessly into the traditional landscape. Holographic touch-displays are built into most walls and everyday objects, popping up or receding at users' whims, allowing convenient and subtle access to telecommunications and data-webs without cluttering the scenery with garish screens. Cybernetic enhancements exist but bear the stigma of being unnatural crutches for the injured. Physicians employ gene-programmed nanite elixers called *panacea* to treat most common ailments, with magic-infused blends available which can make miraculous healing as easy as quaffing a potion. Open-top hover-chariots are a common means of transport for individuals and small groups, which is delightful when the weather is nice.

The Empyrean Olympic Games are a truly godlike affair, held annually in the planetary capital of Olympus, a glorious supercity on the sunny coastline of their Mediterranean Sea. The games involve physical sporting events as well as intellectual feats such as mathematic calculation, timed puzzle-solving, and an intriguing form of competitive meditation that borders on psychic combat. The pervasive influence of the games on Empyrean life cannot be overstated. Victorious Olympians enjoy not only fame and fortune but also elevated political status and increased reproductive rights. Gymnasiums called *casas* (in the style of martial arts *dojos*) founded by former Olympians form the equivalent of noble houses in Empyrea's post-feudal society, and with the dissolution of national boundaries under global imperial rule, the identities of Olympians stem from their *casa* affiliations, not their countries of origin. Rivalries between gymnasiums are fierce, almost gang-like, and tend to involve interests far above and beyond the games themselves.

While competition is everywhere on Empyrea, uncontrolled violence remains rare and taboo – the general populace has no need to struggle for essentials, petty crime rates are low, and the Allfather's global imperial government is remarkably adept at quelling rebellious elements through threats or diplomacy. As such, they haven't had an open war in centuries, and

regional justicars keep a tight lid on instances of local violence. Empyreans are not without aggression, however, and can be exceedingly dangerous if you're stupid or unlucky enough to push them too far. Personal challenges are a socially acceptable means of conflict resolution, as I found out. Sometimes these contests are strictly regulated duels of weaponry or fisticuffs, but just as often disputes are resolved through sports, debate, or games of intellect. I once lost a sweet hover-chariot to one to an upstart Olympian in a bizarre biathlon of street-running and darts – I let the little bastard win to keep the peace, but only just barely. Duels to the death are illegal, but the most brazen of Empyrea's citizens aren't above asking the justicars' forgiveness for the occasional "tragic accident."

While mystical energies are abundant on Empyrea, and the concept of magic is readily accepted by the common person, the actual ability to practice sorcery is largely limited to "heroes", which – ever since the great plague – means the Allfather and the first two or three generations of his descendants. Since the Allfather has been sowing his seed for over two millennia the actual number of sorcerous practitioners is several thousand, spread throughout the world in varying degrees of power but usually occupying the upper echelons of Empyrean society and imperial government. Dissenters believe the Allfather purposefully suppresses the advent of magical traits in the common person through his eugenic controls, in the interest of maintaining his own supremacy. This might be mere conjecture, but it's worth noting that "un-blessed" children – born in secret, without the Allfather's sanction – have a greater chance of developing magical talent. The same dissenters believe that an "un-blessed" child will one day rise to upset the status quo.

The oracles at Delphi remain a notable exception to the rule that all Empyrean sorcery belongs to the Allfather and his get. This mysterious female trio has existed in parallel to the Allfather since ancient times, and their interactions with the great Bellaphon suggest that he heeds their wisdom and respects their significant power. The oracles remain apolitical and have always been aloof and cryptic. But those able to gain access to the oracles temple (past the legions of guards, flocks of noxious cyber-harpies, and a veritable minefield of magical wards) will note that the oracles do not adore the Allfather, and they're perfectly willing to speak of prophecies that foretell his downfall... if you promise not to tattle.

To speak of Empyrea is to speak of the man who rules it, and I've danced around it long enough: in my opinion, August Bellephon is a great man. Wise, charismatic, and brilliant, he has led his people because he truly is the best person for the job – and because he doesn't trust anyone else to do it right. I don't know what that sys about my own political philosophy or morality, but when you get right down to it – as far as supreme dictators go, you could do a lot, lot worse. His rise to power during Empyrea's ancient history was far less bloody than it could have been, and despite wielding god-like power over an entire world for what by now has been millennia, Augustus Bellaphon still retains (most of) his humanity. However, that humanity makes things harder for him, not easier: he worries for his people, grapples with the hard choices a ruler must make, and still feels the bitter sting of others' hatred and betrayal. Heavy is the head that wears the crown, but Augustus Bellaphon strikes me as the kind of man who will never, ever quit.The last attempted coup against the Allfather was a messy, treacherous affair led by Gaius and Helena, an incestuous pair of Bellaphon's eldest children bent on usurping their father.

Turns out the whole sordid plot was spurred on by a visiting Gossamer Lord, who shall remain nameless and who I swear on the Stair was *not* me, with designs on claiming Empyrea as a Domain. The usurpers woefully underestimated Bellaphon, who put down the uprising, killed Gaius, exiled Helena, and thrashed the meddling Gossamer Lord so severely that he (or she) had to beat a hasty retreat through the nearest Door, right in front of the wroth Allfather.

That perilous moment forever shattered the Veil for Bellaphon, introducing him to the concept of the Grand Stair in the most offensive way possible. Terrified by the scope of this newfound vulnerability and fearing another incursion, the Allfather has spent every waking moment since the coup learning everything he can about the Grand Stair and the vast threat it poses. The Door Bellaphon saw open is now permanently severed, but he keeps the site under heavy guard, meticulously analyzing the physical and magical properties of the now-defunct door (with a small

d) for any residual clues as to the nature of what in blazes happened.

I really do believe that, given another century or two, the Allfather would've discovered the Grand Stair on his own terms and might've ventured out willingly, meeting us out here as a peer – or at least under better circumstances. But that's not how things went down, and you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Now I reckon he sees the Grand Stair as a treacherous, dangerous thing to be feared – or worse, to be conquered.

The newer and currently active Door to Empyrea remains a secret, opening onto the terrace of a sumptuous seaside villa owned by Tazia De Luca, one of the Allfather's youngest daughters. Tazia is the widowed matriarch of Casa De Luca, a prominent household and gymnasium specializing in the beautiful sport of Empyrean blade-dancing. Tazia looks to be a beautiful, olive-skinned thirty-five-year-old but in an actuality is an exceptionally well-preserved ninety (the Allfather's longevity is a heritable trait). Clever but cautious, Tazia is well aware of the prior feud between her elder siblings and her father, though she blames the mysterious, otherworldly meddler for the whole regrettable debacle. Tazia remains loyal to her father, who has never wronged her personally, though she secretly keeps in touch with her exiled (and still seditious) elder sister Helena in hopes of one day repairing the familial rift.

The Empyrean general populace remains entirely ignorant of other Gossamer worlds, as they should be, but several of the Allfather's other children know snippets of the truth and the notion that their paternal potentate isn't the end-all of power has had a further destabilizing effect on their already dysfunctional family dynamics. Another coup is brewing, everybody knows it, and the Allfather assumes (perhaps correctly) that any visiting Gossamer Lord is another threat. If you visit, assume you're under mystical, personal, and technological surveillance the instant you make your presence known as an outsider, which isn't hard to do in a world where data-web terminals have face-recognition software and the Allfather's agents are quick to inquire into unexplained shenanigans. That said, the world is big, populous, and the Allfather isn't actually omniscient, so it *is* possible to sneak in unnoticed, but that carries with it the chance of surprising Bellaphon, which is probably much worse than being under constant watch. If he ever 'caught' another Gossamer Lord, I'm not sure whether he'd pour on the charm and try and pump you for information over dinner, subject you to forensic vivisection, nuke you from orbit, or all of the above in sequence. When I figured all this out, I realized why that gorgeous brunette had been so nice to me... and why I'd never had a moment alone my whole visit. Feeling unwelcome, I left Empyrea swiftly but quietly, though I look forward to going back some day when I might not have to look over my shoulder the entire time.

If you visit Empyrea, savor it – it is a truly beautiful world with a host of splendors, and my favorite vacation spot of all time – but be cautious. And if you see that brunette, tell her the man with the golden javelin sends his regards.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Fusion
Magic Level:	Magic is Known and Believed
Security:	None
Type:	Personal Domain* [1 Point] (Allfather Augustus Bellaphon)
Control:	Control of Contents* [1 Point]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Average Wrighting – Average
*Special:	Allfather Bellaphon is the undisputed ruler of Empyrea, wielding nearly supreme magical, political, and technological power, but he is only on the verge of becoming a Warden of the Grand Stair.

How to Use Empyrea

- Empyrea is, from one point of view, a gleaming utopia – a culturally rich and technologically advanced society full of beautiful, diverse, healthy people who have pursued self-improvement to the point of near perfection. Use Empyrea as an example of the best the multiverse has to offer, a respite from all those other war-torn worlds where strife runs rampant and another apocalypse is just around the corner. Relax. Empyrea makes for a great vacation destination for Gossamer Lords, or a luxurious summer home for a mentor or ally looking to live the good life.

- Perhaps Empyrea's superficial perfection is a mask for darker truths. Wrestle with what it all means. Can a society exist under the absolute control of one man, yet still feel free? Is the Allfather truly a benevolent figure, compassionate in his rule and worthy of his station, or is he really an autocratic tyrant playing at godhood? Characters might hear from both dissidents and supporters of the Allfather, and even meet the man himself, yet still disagree. Usurpation of the Allfather would mean plunging this world into an age of chaos and strife, harming or killing millions, but would it be worth it?

- The characters stumble upon an underground community of rebel Empyreans attempting to live life free from the Allfather's control, cultivating the rogue magical talents of their "un-blessed" children in hopes of forging their own destiny. Suddenly, a child of prophecy becomes a pawn in a lethal game between the conflicted Allfather, his overzealous justicars, the earnest rebels, and an ambitious cabal of the Allfather's elder progeny intent on a patricidal coup.

- The characters are tasked with an impossible heist: stealing precious research from the Allfather to prevent him from accessing the Grand Stair years before his time. The data crystals they're supposed to swipe are kept in the Allfather's private sanctum, and the only way to access the data without triggering innumerable failsafes is to enter the sanctum at the Allfather's invitation – an honor only bestowed upon the winner of the Empyrean Olympic Games. The characters must establish cover identities, gain the patronage of a gymnasium, and compete in the games without revealing themselves as something far more than the average Olympian. Should they be successful and win the games, perhaps the Allfather congratulates them... knowingly.

- Augustus Bellaphon could be the next Gossamer Lord, and his introduction to the Grand Stair will be a pivotal moment in deciding whether he becomes a hero or villain to the multiverse. Bellaphon asks the characters to show him the ways of the Grand Stair. What kind of mentors will they be? Who else is interested in influencing (or poaching) this new Gossamer Lord?

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Nightmare Kingdom

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Nightmare Kingdom

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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> "The dirty concrete landing was a gloom of shadows — the nearest two lightbulbs in the industrial-looking stairwell were busted out and dark, even though that's not supposed to happen on the Grand Stair. Something crunched beneath my feet, but it wasn't glass, and I wasn't going to look down. A single bloody hand-print smeared the wall beside the Door, which was covered in chipped black paint... and stood wide open. On the other side of the threshold, dense grey mist swirled, revealing a pair of glowing red eyes. I heard my name being called, faintly, buried somewhere under all that screaming."
>
> **- Yaeger's Travelogue**

The Nightmare Kingdom is a living, breathing, waking world of nightmares made manifest in a soul-crushing hellscape dedicated to the provocation, cultivation, and consumption of terror.

And, *no*, I'm not being melodramatic.

First, a bit of conceptual framework: we have always known that the concept of "reality" as applies to the Gossamer worlds is... *variable*, to say the least. Most of us, even high and mighty Gossamer Lords, come to rely upon certain principles: time moves in one direction, mortal lives begin and end, and matter and energy transmute in form but tend not to be created or destroyed. Hence, it is unsettling to experience a world where the laws of reality are so loose that even these most basic precepts do not apply. Aside from being terribly dangerous, this staggering lack of structure calls into question the very nature of existence, with all the philosophical baggage *that* entails. So, with that shaky foundation in mind, imagine a world where the difference between thought and reality disappears almost entirely – a place where the arrangement of matter, energy, and space-time occurs not according to scientific law but instead by psychic whim. Furthermore, imagine such a world in which fear is the dominant form of psychic energy, more powerful than atomic fission and more pervasive than sunlight, with the very fabric of the realm contracting, expanding, and twisting according to the ebb and flow of terror. Finally, imagining a world with all those lovely qualities, picture it running wild since the dawn of time, stalking the vast gulf of Shadow-space in a never-ending hunt for fear.

Some make the fatal mistake of thinking the Nightmare Kingdom is "just a dream", but it surely isn't; the monsters and threats of the Kingdom are very real, and no amount of waking up can cure its harms.

Ancient, powerful, and ever changing, the Nightmare Kingdom the content of the fears it consumes drives it. Oftentimes this interaction causes the realm to mimic the appearance of other Gossamer worlds down to the smallest detail, either in reflexive response to the fears of its victims, or at the direction of the Kingdom's ruler. Hence, the Kingdom has gone by countless names over the eons, constantly misidentified as a myriad of different worlds. I've heard accounts of the Kingdom guising itself as thousands of different iterations of Earth, as a false version of Shatterlight, as an endless void of infinite vacant space, and even condensing down in its entirety to become a perfect replica of That-Dark-Closet-Where-Those-Bad-Things-Happened. Historically there are recognizable patterns in the Kingdom's appearance according to the personality and designs of its ruler, but it is important to remember that it *could* appear to be anywhere. You could be sitting in it right now.

Another disturbing quality of the Nightmare Kingdom is – it wanders. I'll elaborate by way of metaphor: if the vast nothingness of Shadow is a darkened street, and the Gossamer worlds are individual houses on that street, all connected by the paved walkways of the Grand

Stair, the Nightmare Kingdom is the insane homicidal drifter skulking through backyards and trying latches. Doors to the Nightmare Kingdom appear and disappear aggressively, commonly appearing in dreadful places and/or near someone experiencing acute fear. The Nightmare Kingdom often lures victims through the Door, or sometimes the Kingdom's frightful boogeymen just pop out for a moment to say "boo." The Kingdom has an affinity for bedroom closets, by the way. My own theory regarding this is profoundly heretical: I think the Kingdom is unmoored from any stationary point in the vast gulf of Shadow and thereby has the ability to connect itself directly to other Gossamer worlds without crossing the Grand Stair. Other Gossamer Lords assure me I'm wrong, that there must be some other explanation – perhaps the Kingdom has found a niche on the Stair where the hallway between Doors is measured in inches instead of yards, or it is some twisting of the Veil which gives the illusion of a direct connection. Perhaps... but I know what I saw.

Despite its mercurial nature, it *is* possible to claim the Nightmare Kingdom as a Domain. Those who have done so in the past were predominantly power-mad Umbra Masters, walking nightmares in their own right: Morpheus, Ikelos, Lady Phrike, The Dark Man, Morgana, Papa Midnight, one of the elder Dwimmerlaik, that guy with nails in his head... the list goes on. They were and are the stuff of legends, boogeymen of the highest order, though the only thing more unsettling than their tenures as overlords of terror is the fact that those tenures ended. While ruling the Nightmare Kingdom provides an unprecedented forum for the indulgence of sadistic fantasy, wielding such unbridled power is terribly taxing, even on the most jaded psyches. As such, while some rulers hold power for millennia – and some for mere days – sovereignty over the Nightmare Kingdom invariably ends in ruin. Personally, I believe the Kingdom has a personality of its own and from time to time will reject its mortal steersman, terminating the relationship in favor of fresh management; maybe the Kingdom grows bored, maybe the ruler doesn't feed it enough... or maybe the most delicious fear of all is the fear of a king.

The Ghoul

The current master of the Nightmare Kingdom is a gruesome creature known only as "the Ghoul". Like many Umbra Masters, the Ghoul can assume

many different physical incarnations. But, his/her/its most recent appearances have been as either a tall male umbral gaunt-like cyclops, a pallid teenage girl concealed by a tangle of long black hair, or a more monstrous form which I've only heard described as "like an androgynous dog-person in a latex gimp suit, but made of maggots." Judging by the tableaus of terror the Ghoul commonly concocts, I believe it to be very familiar with 20th century America – though whether it originated from that historical period on a specific Gossamer Earth, I do not know. If it was ever human, or anything close to human, those days are long gone.

Fully melded with the Nightmare Kingdom, the Ghoul has mastered the very pliable gossamer fabric of the Domain and uses this god-like power to shape and warp reality in a violent orgy of phantasmagorical tableaus, expertly focused on cultivating anxiety, terror, and despair. In other, smaller, words: it really loves scaring the shit out of people, using the most powerful special effects engine in the entire multiverse. While inside the Kingdom, the Ghoul is effectively omniscient and omnipresent, appearing or disappearing at will, though it prefers to act through agents and totems instead of appearing directly.

For all its power and sadistic indulgence, the Ghoul may not be as 'in control' as the maniacal laughter might lead us to believe. During the last decade, there have been increased sightings of the Ghoul venturing away from the Nightmare Kingdom, lurking in darkened corners of the Grand Stair and paying unwelcome visits to other Gossamer worlds. While these excursions could simply be hunting behavior, I have heard several reports that the Ghoul seemed surprisingly reluctant to return home. My own theory is that the Ghoul is secretly looking for a successor, either willing or unwilling.

Master of Terror, Slave to Fear

The Nightmare Kingdom is much more of a curse than an asset, and "ownership" of that terrible place should shake even the strongest characters to their core, as absolute power corrupts absolutely. Any character who claims the Nightmare Kingdom as a Domain automatically begins drawing mystical sustenance from the fears of others, whether they wish to or not, and it is impossible to taste that dark power without becoming addicted. This process can be slow and insidious, or swift and shocking, but should be inevitable.

The Nightmare Kingdom can claim a character as its owner against that character's will, at the dramatic discretion of the gamemaster, even if that character does not have a sufficient reserve of advancement points immediately available to purchase the Kingdom as a Domain – they'll pay later, oh yes they will. Such a drastic personal invasion might come after a courting period where the Kingdom victimizes and corrupts the character, breaking down their willpower and acclimating them to the realm's twisted, terror-sucking reality. This event could transform the character into a major villain, and/or begin an epic struggle as the other characters struggle to save their wayward ally from a fate worse than death.

Typical Denizens

The Nightmare Kingdom is full of people and personalities, most of who fall into one of two categories: predators and prey. The earnest county sheriff who warns you to forget those lights in the trees, the plucky group of high-schoolers gone out camping on a spooky summer night, or the creepy old fortune teller who keeps muttering about doom, they all share space with vampires, ghosts, and stranger boogeymen who sow and reap fear on behalf of the realm. While the Kingdom and its ruler vastly prefer the taste and potency of fresh fear from other realms and visiting victims therefrom, the ebb and flow of recycled dread amongst the Kingdom's native inhabitants seems to function like some form of profane metaphysical circulatory and digestion system. Hence, the nefarious powers-that-be do seem to have an interest in willing a population into being and terrorizing them, even without an outside audience. I pity those poor folks, and hope for their sake they do not remember their torments from life to life.

It would be wrong to categorize the inhabitants of the Nightmare Kingdom as mere phantasms; they're not. Every man, woman, child, dog, monster, and specter that exists there truly does exist within the confines of that gossamer reality, albeit sometimes for only brief periods dictated by the cruel whims of the realm and its ruler. Existence in the Nightmare Kingdom is a terrible, fleeting thing – the Ghoul's complete control of the Kingdom's makeup and time flow allows it to effectively turn back time, recreating the world to perfectly mimic scenes from "the past", or simply looping events in perfect repetition, trapping residents in a never-ending cycle. These temporal illusions don't alter the internal chronology of non-native victims, however, so while the local denizens may seem jog up and down the time stream, reliving their terrible lives over and over, visitors can't actually undo their own pasts. That said, most denizens of the Nightmare Realm are hapless mortals who serve as both audience and backdrop to the realm's regular pageants of horror.

Threats

Boogeymen is a catch-all term for the terrorizing predatory monsters of the Nightmare Kingdom. They come in many forms: vampires, werewolves, ghosts, zombies, serial killers, obsessed psychopaths, vicious wild animals... pretty much any frightening creature imaginable, though the Ghoul tends to prefer the Hollywood classics. Boogeymen are the grim workforce of the Kingdom, tasked with inflicting anguish and sowing terror amongst the prey population and any outsider victims who wander in. When empowered by the Ghoul, boogeymen

can even pierce the Veil and venture onto the Grand Stair or into other Gossamer worlds for very brief excursions, usually no further than the immediate threshold of a Door. Most boogeymen are no true match a Gossamer Lord once you get past their theatrics, though even the least of them are aggressive, persistent, and increasingly dangerous in greater numbers. Their elite – the master vampire, the risen pharaoh, that unspeakable tentacled behemoth beneath the waves – are true and deadly threats.

The Man With Red Hands is the greatest of the boogeymen and the Ghoul's chief lieutenant. Immortal and incorporeal, this malevolent demonic spirit affects the physical world by possessing the bodies of others. While the spirit is capable of mimicking a host's reactions and mannerisms, it tends to reveal its presence eventually through its wicked smile – and by coating the host's hands in fresh red blood. This gory motif usually accompanies an act of gut-wrenching violence and/or self-mutilation. Please believe me when I say that there is no greater bastard in all the multiverse than the Man, and should you ever feel the filthy tendrils of his soul seeping into yours, do yourself a favor and put a bullet in your head before its too late.

Notable Locations

Under the stewardship of the Ghoul, the Nightmare Kingdom tends to default to the appearance of some decade within 20th Century America, though more exotic environments and horrific hellscapes readily spawn from seemingly mundane beginnings.

Lomax, Maine is a sleepy little town in the backwoods, perpetually stuck in some doldrum-y gap in the late 1950s. The town has seen better days: folks are depressed, the lumber mill dried up after all those accidents, and the only place in town that draws any tourists, is the bed-and-breakfast up on the hill. It used to be a church, and before that is was a mental hospital, and before that it was the home of the eccentric town founder, whose odd religion is best forgotten. The kids in Lomax know that something's wrong, that there's a reason why their parents don't want them out after dark. The Door to the Nightmare Kingdom in this incarnation opens out of a supply closet into the humble break room of the Lomax County Sheriff's Department.

Running Scared

Fear is power in the Nightmare Kingdom, and adjudicating whether or not a character is 'really scared' enough to be fed upon by the Domain can be subjective, nuanced, and tricky. Here are some options for gamemasters:

Weakest Link – The first time the Nightmare Kingdom or one of its agents tries to frighten the group, assume that the frightening effect or creature is sufficiently scary to frighten the character with the lowest Psyche. This fear feeds the Kingdom, thereby increasing its ability to frighten such that it can scare the character with the next highest Psyche, and so on.

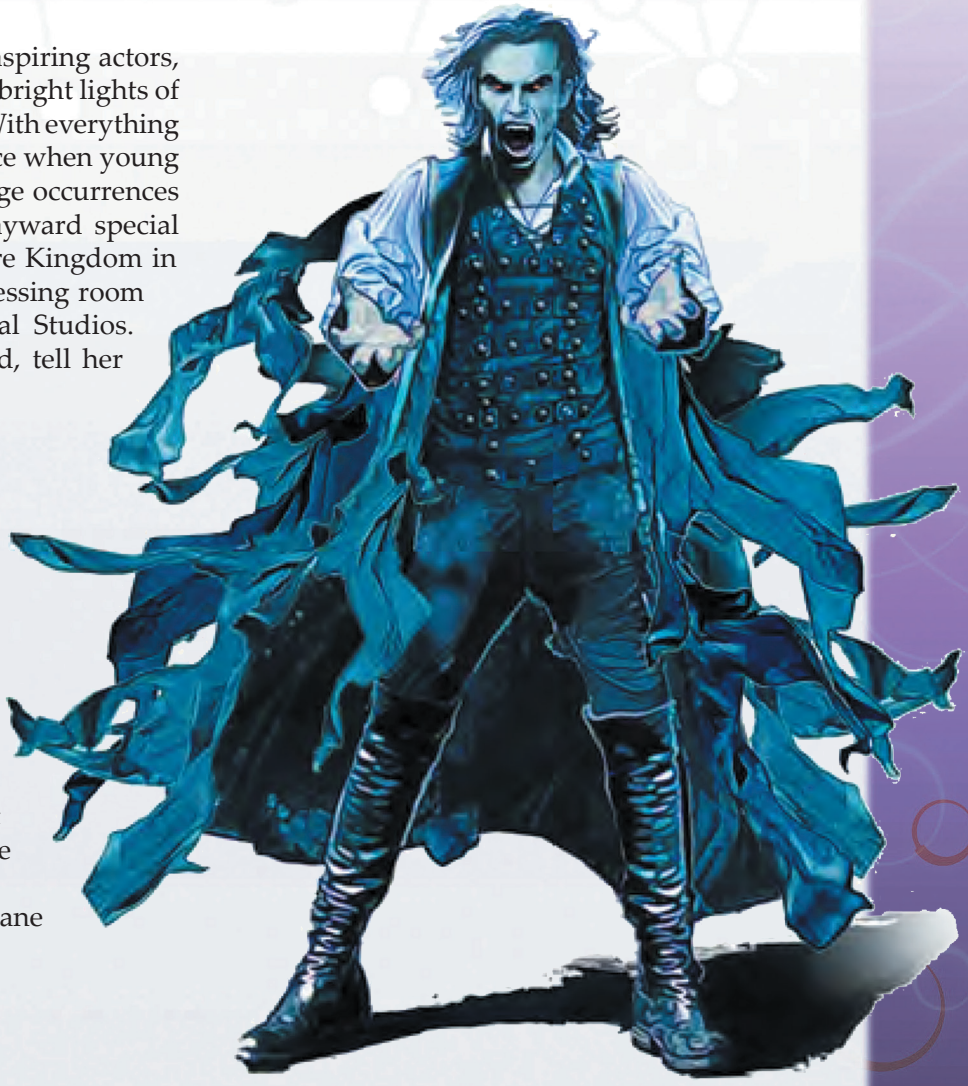
By The Numbers – Scaring a character is a test of Psyche. Assume that the following entities have a Psyche equivalent to the following for purposes of this test: Average Boogeyman, Psyche 10; Elite Boogeyman, Psyche 25; The Man With Red Hands, Psyche 50; The Ghoul, Psyche 100. The gamemaster can always adjust these figures to fit the power level of the game.

The Honor System – Just ask each player whether their character is scared (even if the character chooses to act tough), and trust their answer. Gamemasters always reserve the right to call bullshit.

Bad Bad NYC is New York City rotting in the most degraded moments of the 1980s. Urban decay has crept over everything like dirty graffiti, crime runs rampant, and entrenched police corruption ensures that nothing is getting better any time soon. By night, the streets buzz with garish neon, the flickers of burnt-out signs illuminate vampires feeding in the alleys and werewolves howling from the rooftops. Serial killers are more popular than celebrities. Grim vigilantes strive to make a difference and bring justice to the streets, but their brief flashes of tarnished heroism only serve to highlight the fact that the world is going to Hell in a hand basket, and that's exactly what it deserves. The Door to the Nightmare Kingdom in this incarnation opens out of a side door into a filthy alleyway just half a block from Times Square.

Tinseltown is Hollywood, California at a height of glitz and glamor in the golden days of the early 1930s. The blockbuster popularity of monster movies such as *Dracula, Frankenstein,* and *The Mummy* has flooded film studio coffers to

overflowing, drawing swarms of aspiring actors, actresses, and screenwriters to the bright lights of the city where dreams come true. With everything going so well, folks try not to notice when young starlets go missing, or when strange occurrences up in the hills get blamed on wayward special effects. The Door to the Nightmare Kingdom in this incarnation opens into the dressing room of some A-list starlet at Universal Studios. If you don't mind getting slapped, tell her Johnny Zee says hi.



Final Thoughts

The Nightmare Kingdom is dangerous, powerful, and eternal. No matter how many times we seal it off, or wipe it from the maps, or defeat its unspeakably depraved figurehead, it will return. So the best strategy is to learn to recognize the telltale dread of its illusions, steel your mind against the terrors that await, and run the other way.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Other (varies depending on apparent time period)
Magic Level:	Magic is Known and Believed
Security:	Guarded [4 Points] (the monsters of nightmare)
Type:	Primal World [4 Points]
Control:	Control of Destiny [4 Points] (current owner: The Ghoul)
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Weak Umbra – Powerful Wrighting – Blocked
*Special:	*Terror Incarnate*. The owner of the Nightmare Kingdom feeds upon the fear of visitors to the Kingdom, as well as fear experienced in close proximity to (within a few yards of) any Door which leads thereto. The owner may use this psychic sustenance to heal wounds, fuel Powers, bolster Attributes, or divert the fear back into the Nightmare Kingdom itself, shaping the realm and its denizens to suit the victim's darkest fears.

How to Use The Nightmare Kingdom

- The Nightmare Kingdom is precisely what it sounds like – a realm of nightmares infested by boogeymen and ruled by a monstrous tyrant, formed for the exclusive purpose of striking unbearable fear into the hearts of its victims and then sucking that sweet sweet terror from the very marrow of their souls. It is a primal world, addressed with a "The", for a reason. Use the Nightmare Kingdom as the most horrifying thing imaginable in your game, capable of making even confident Gossamer Lords quake in their boots and check the shadows for watching eyes.

- Force the characters to face their fears. The Nightmare Kingdom is an opportunity to suddenly and aggressively make any story take a turn into the realm of horror, and don't be shy about using the unique characteristics of this predatory reality to press the issue. As experienced travelers of the Grand Stair, characters can grow complacent in their perceived ability to avoid problems simply by fleeing them in favor of safer worlds, but the mobile and insidious Nightmare Kingdom can turn that dynamic on its head. Capable of diverting Doors, disguising itself as other places, and sending its boogeymen on fearful forays into other Gossamer worlds, the Nightmare Kingdom cannot and should not be ignored.

- Use your favorite horror movies as inspiration, either directly or indirectly. The Nightmare Kingdom shapes itself according to the whims of its owner, and its current owner – the Ghoul – may very well be from a 20th-century Earth-world where the scary classics are well known. Then, if the characters call out the Ghoul's references, increase the stakes as the nightmares shift to utterly surreal and alien environments that will have them begging for the old familiar tropes.

- A Gossamer world ally reports experiencing horrible nightmares and entreats the characters to investigate what force is terrorizing their reality. Investigation reveals that the Nightmare Kingdom has been opening Doors to this other Gossamer world, sending out boogeymen and harvesting fear. The characters can stall this predation by severing the Doors being used, but not for long. Another ally suggests luring the predatory reality away to feast upon some other world, but how to do so and the moral consequences of such a tactic are not easy questions to answer.

- The Nightmare Kingdom is a Domain that can claim a character as its owner, corrupting the soul and rewriting destiny to seize the object of its obsession. Once the characters have had a brush with this terrible realm and escaped, pursue one character relentlessly as the Nightmare Kingdom tries to gets its hooks into a new playmate. At first the Ghoul appears to be the one sending boogeymen and fell visions, but once confronted the Ghoul claims no agency at all – he/she/it is simply a soon-to-be-discarded spectator, just another victim of the great machine.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

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Tetsujin Shogunate

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Tetsujin Shogunate

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Special Thanks to Jason Durall for his help in developing this.

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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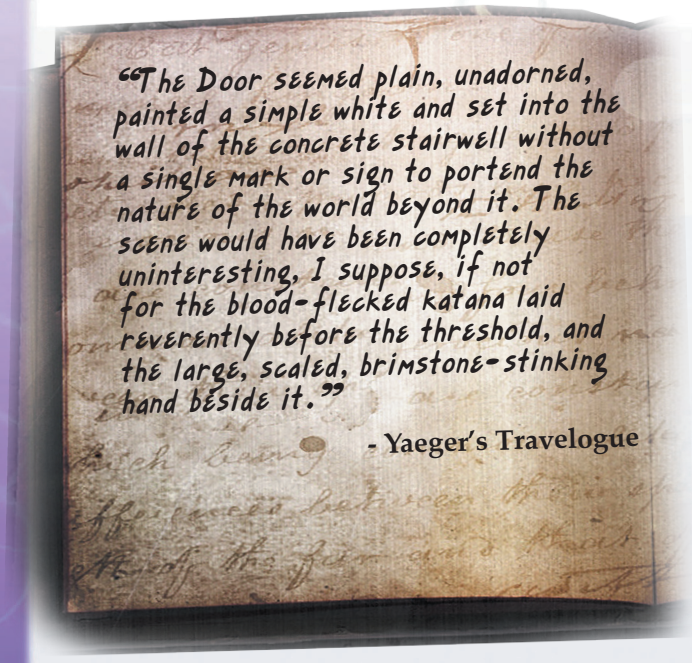

The Tetsujin Shogunate used to be a normal-ish version of Earth... before little green men crash-landed in feudal Japan and started building giant robots. That, as you might expect, shook things up a bit.

The backstory goes like this: Somewhere out amongst the stars in that particular gossamer reality, two advanced spacefaring alien races – the monstrous *oni* and the ingenious *kappa* – were at war. During a mission into local space (which the aliens considered a remote backwater of the quadrant) an *oni* battle cruiser intercepted a *kappa* scouting vessel. The ensuing dogfight sent both ships plummeting into Earth's atmosphere in a catastrophic event now referred to as "the Rain of Falling Stars." Engine sections of the *oni* ship broke apart and impacted Africa, Europe, and North America with the force of meteors, with smaller inhabited sections touching down slightly-less-cataclysmically in central Asia. Dust clouds, radiation, and alien plagues decimated most of the planet's population in the ensuing years, leaving eastern Asia and the Pacific islands as the only habitable refuges for humanity.

The *kappa* ship and its jettisoned life-pods made landfall up and down the island of Japan. Injured and stranded, the *kappa* were hunted and many killed or captured in witch-hunts led by frightened, superstitious humans. Facing undignified extinction at the hands of hairless apes, the *kappa* eventually rallied and struck a deal with the ruling Tokugawa clan, bartering their technology to the human shogunate in exchange for physical protection and mutual support against the *oni*. The rampaging *oni* had already begun to conquer Mongolia, China and the Korean peninsula, and the Tokugawa recognized that the demons at their doorstep would require titanic weaponry. So the *kappa* built them titans.

Taller than castles, mightier than armies, the *tetsujin* were to be the ultimate weapon against the marauding *oni*, powered by ingenious *kappa* technology but dependent upon human supply chains for their construction, fuel, and maintenance. While the *kappa* might have otherwise chosen a different form for their war machines, the human shogunate insisted (with hand upon sword) that the *tetsujin* require a human pilot – a stipulation borne of human distrust for the *kappa*, and perhaps not unwise. What began as extravagant suits of power-armor soon became enormous samurai-shaped robots, crafted in proportion to the largest monster-elders of the *oni*. Tokugawa Akira became the first Iron Shogun, piloting *Hachiman*, the first true *tetsujin*, a four-armed mechanical warrior

clad in shining silver armor and equipped with twin star-metal blades capable of felling mountains. Engaging the enemy on a string of islands just barely off the coast of the vulnerable homeland, *Hachiman* single-handedly laid waste to three armies of *oni*-blooded berserkers, drove off a dozen true *oni*, and lasted ten whole minutes against the Dragon King before its reactor exploded, clearing the battlefield and changing the nature of warfare forever.

Typical Denizens

Human civilization in the Tetsujin Shogunate clings to life by the barest of threads, defiantly dedicating every fraction of their being towards survival and the war effort. Simple farmers toil in the fields and rice paddies, cultivating food for the nation and looking scanning the horizon for glimpses of their gigantic heroes. Miners, smiths, and craftsmen labor ceaselessly, forging common ores and stranger metals into enormous components to be assembled in *kappa*-supervised factories. Every able-bodied male not already essential to production is a member of the shogunate's vast samurai-led army. Decades of punishing attrition have reduced the adult male population to such a degree that even the most chauvinistic patriarchs concede the necessity of arming the fairer sex, producing a recent generation of women-warriors proud and eager to join the fight.

Humanity does not end past the shores of Japan, however. Elsewhere in the world, sickened and mutated survivors shamble through the wastelands created by the impacts of the *oni* ships and the ensuing radioactive fallout. In eastern Asia, the *oni* have enslaved and organized the remaining human population, corrupting minds with their will-sapping alien pheromones and creating a caste of mutated berserker warriors. Disgusting experiments in creating human-*oni* hybrids are thus far only rumor, spurred by sightings of the most twisted of the *oni*-blooded, but the fear of a self-reproducing demonic sub-race keeps many daimyos up at night. Those humans living in *oni* territory who are not overtly controlled submit out of fear and despondent pragmatism, resigned to the fact that Hell has come to Earth and their demonic masters now rule the world.

The *oni* number in the hundreds, though their pervasive influence and staggering destructive power make it seem like they are legion. Some *oni* are snarling beasts prone to bloodlust and mayhem, while the smarter ones rule over armies of corrupted human slaves as warlords and demon-kings. Might makes right amongst the *oni*, as any

any formal hierarchy they possessed disintegrated with their ship, but they remain united in their racial desire to to eradicate the *kappa* and plunder any extant technology which would allow them to leave Earth, or at least dominate it unchallenged. The present alpha-monster of the *oni* is the Dragon King, a radioactive fire-breathing reptile capable of converting calories directly into biomass and increasing its size to gargantuan proportions.

The *kappa* are a dying race on Earth, reduced to less than a dozen living souls. Cloistered away in heavily guarded fortresses atop mountains or deep underground, these cranky little inventors are paranoid and ill-tempered, drawn from their reclusion only by the knowledge that their survival depends on actively equipping humanity to defeat the marauding *oni*. Despite the fact that they are presently engaged in the salvation of the human race, the *kappa*'s aid is reluctant and entirely self-serving. Rumors persist of an intact section of the *kappa* starship sunk off Japan's eastern coast where the never-before-seen elder of their crew secretly makes repairs, intent on abandoning humanity to their fate and leaving this accursed rock behind.

Threats

Samurai are the face and heart of this world, with legions of determined fighters forming the prominent upper echelons of the human resistance. The samurai live to serve, steadfastly supporting their daimyos and the Iron Shogun as they battle *oni*-blooded minions in the shadows of clashing titans. Most samurai fight with traditional weapons and armor, though the most elite warriors carry *kappa*-blessed equipment such as star-metal swords, respirator-helmets, and cybernetic power-armor.

Tetsujin are the gigantic champions which represent Earth's last hope for victory and survival. Constructed of materials refined by technology light-years beyond human science, these war machines are incredibly strong and durable, capable of withstanding punishing amounts of physical impact, heat, pressure, and radiation. Limited in their mobility and agility, *tetsujin* tend to be a trifle clunky. Fuel constraints render sustained flight a near-impossibility, though thruster-assisted leaps and charges provide dramatic bursts of speed. Their weapons tend to be of the humongous melee variety – swords, axes, shields, and the like – and some have short-range missiles, but energy-blast weapons remain rare and dangerously unstable. *Tetsujin* pilots are the best of the best, worshipped like demigods and showered with bittersweet praise for however long remains of their perilous lives.

Kappa are puny, amphibious tinkerers whose brilliant intellects make up for their diminutive reptilian bodies. They compensate for Earth's oppressively strong gravity with the aid of cybernetic exo-shells, submerging themselves in water the rest of the time. *Kappa* technology demonstrates their intuitive connection to the Eidolon, and their elders' psyches are strong enough for telepathy and psychic combat.

Oni are aggressive, demonic-looking aliens with a strong affinity to the Umbra. Evolved on a hostile home world with a noxious atmosphere and higher gravity, on Earth they can breathe smoke, bask in radiation, and enjoy superhuman

strength. Most *oni* have horns, colorful skin, and wild hair, though the greatest among them have truly monstrous forms resembling serpentine dragons or titanic dinosaurs.

Oni-blooded are humans corrupted and controlled by rationed ingestion of *oni* blood, which is both addictive and highly mutagenic. *Oni*-blooded berserkers have enhanced strength, immunity to pain, and use their fangs, claws, and horns as savagely as any animal. Some *oni*-blooded wield more subtle mutations such as acidic spittle, hypnotic pheromones, or regeneration.

Ninjas. The Tetsujin Shogunate is practically infested with the stealthy, deadly little bastards. While the ninja clans once served the shogunate as dependable mercenaries, since the Rain of Falling Stars the ninja have withdrawn from their former profession and now pursue only their own inscrutable schemes. Ninja are notorious thieves of alien technology, outfitting themselves with stolen *kappa* weapons, pilfering advanced materials from poorly guarded *tetsujin*, and even experimenting on themselves with *oni* mutagens. While the shogunate's official position is that the ninja are selfish traitors to humanity, I suspect there's more to it. Perhaps the ninja are merely playing the long game for even higher stakes. Perhaps, in the end, it will be the ninja who save this world from the alien invaders, *kappa* and *oni* alike.

Big Trouble

Each tetsujin possesses its own unique assortment of weapons, armor, and special tricks, but even the most basic tetsujin has the following qualities:

Immense Vitality	[4 points]
Double Speed	[2 points]
Paragon Stamina	[2 points]
Combat Reflexes	[2 points]
Double Damage	[2 points]
Resistant to Firearms	[2 points]
Total	[14 points]

Spending points to own a tetsujin would seem necessary only if a character wishes to use it outside of the world of the Tetsujin Shogunate – but that would require getting the immense contraption through a Door, and good luck with that.

Notable Locations

Edo Castle is the capital of the Tetsujin Shogunate – a sprawling fortress located on the central eastern coast of Japan, right where the great city of Tokyo might have one day existed if things had turned out differently. The castle occupies dozens of square miles, divided into multiple citadels, each with its own walls, keeps, towers, moats, gates, and courtyards. Still primarily medieval in its construction, the castle defenses are augmented at critical junctures by *kappa* force-fields, sensor arrays, and weapons systems. The Iron Shogun and his closest daimyos reside there, guarded by several thousand of the shogunate's most elite samurai and the twin *tetsujin*, *Brother Golden Sun* and *Sister Silver Moon*. Edo Castle is also the home of at least one *kappa*, hidden deep below the foundations in an immense cavern dedicated to *tetsujin* research and development.

The Pit of Demons is a gathering-point of *oni* forces, squatting in a miles-wide crater in the midst of the northern Korean Peninsula. It is the sleeping-place of the Dragon King, whose seismic snoring shakes the region with the force of earthquakes, adding to the constant din of howling *oni* warlords and their slavering *oni*-blooded armies. It is from this hellish pit the *oni* launch most of their attacks, sending their great beasts and marshaled forces down to the shore to cross the Sea of Japan in search of blood.

Hachiman's Gate is a string of small island fortifications just off the western coast of the isle of Japan, forming an essential lookout and first line of defense for the Tetsujin Shogunate. One or more *tetsujin* are always standing at the ready, on guard against the inevitability of the next *oni* invasion. Hachiman's Gate has been the site of dozens of battles, and the irradiated waters around the islands are full of eerie "reefs" comprised of the gigantic remains of rotting monsters and shattered heroes. The Door to this world opens through the pilot hatch in the side of a severed *tetsujin* head which lays rusting on the beach.

Final Thoughts

Epic alien monsters battling titanic robots for the fate of humanity – what more could you ask for?

In all seriousness, I hope they survive.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Medieval / Other (advanced alien robotics)
Magic Level:	Unknown
Security:	None
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (presently unclaimed by any Gossamer Lord)
Control:	None
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Average Wrighting – Average
*Special:	N/A

How to Use The Tatsujin Shogunate

- Go big or go home! The world of Tetsujin Shogunate is, first and foremost, an arena for epic battles between titanic mechanized samurai and colossal alien monsters. Indulge shamelessly in all of your mecha-versus-kaiju fantasies, then allow the characters to climb into a *tetsujin* and sock it to a rampaging beast about to besiege the last stronghold of humanity. Roar! Smash!

- There are plenty of excuses to get a character into the cockpit of a *tetsujin*. In an initial battle with gigantic *oni*, a pilot is killed and a *tetsujin* becomes soaked in dangerous levels of radiation; while the titanic contraption is still operational, only a new pilot with the fortitude of a Gossamer Lord can hope to survive long enough to do battle with the monsters at the gates. Or perhaps the characters meet with one of the reclusive *kappa*, and the ingenious alien upgrades a *tetsujin* into a super-*tetsujin* in order to take advantage of the newcomer's superhuman abilities and strike a vital blow. Or perhaps they just steal one for a joyride!

- After a series of nearly-lethal ambushes by swarms of mutagenically-enhanced and technologically-adept ninjas, the characters are drawn into an audience with an enlightened ninja master who realizes they are much more than they seem. The ninja master apologizes for the assassination attempts, but, now that it is clear that the characters are neither agents of the *kappa* or the *oni*, the ninja clans beseech the mysterious visitors to help them free humanity from the threat of alien domination. While eradication of the monstrous *oni* armies might be the first step toward liberation, the scheming *kappa* must be dealt with – killed, neutralized, or sent back to the stars – if mankind is truly to regain control of Earth and command of their destiny.

- Show the monsters some love. Perhaps the "rampaging" *oni* are just misunderstood brutes, victims of circumstance and vicious propaganda by the insidious *kappa*. Upon interrogation of a remarkably eloquent *oni* lieutenant, the characters realize that the *oni* desperation to breach the walls of Edo Castle isn't a matter of bloodlust, but rather survival. Earth's environment is subtly toxic to *oni* minds and bodies, and they're always hostile because they're dying! Hidden in a *kappa* research laboratory deep beneath Edo Castle is a cure for the *oni*, but who knows whether providing that cure will bring peace... or result in even greater bloodshed.

- How might you get an enormous *tetsujin* through a Door and off-world? One piece at a time! Just like the Johnny Cash song about the guy smuggling Cadillac parts out of the factory every day in his lunch box, a sly ally of the characters has pilfered a patchwork of authentic *tetsujin* components. It has taken decades, but this jigsaw puzzle in the shape of a giant samurai is nearly complete. The final essential part is a *tetsujin*'s system command module – effectively the titan's heart – though this last piece must be plucked fresh from an operational *tetsujin*!

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

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Stratospheria

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"Up another flight of dirty con-crete stairs, I came to the next Door, painted white with an ornate silver knob etched with the lines and whorls of swirling clouds. As my hand drew close, I felt a chilly draft coming from the knob, even though it bore no keyhole, gap, or opening. Forgetting the warnings of that kooky guy with the goggles, I threw the Door open with reckless abandon and strode through, only to be greeted by the roaring winds and rushing clouds of a seemingly infinite drop. I survived, of course, but they really should put up a sign about that first step."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

In all the gossamer worlds across the multiverse, the eternal cosmic forces of Eidolon and Umbra clash and counter each other, building and destroying, organizing and disorganizing, ebbing and flowing. On "normal" gossamer worlds, these dueling principles tend to balance each other out in a rough equilibrium, though that degree of roughness can vary wildly. In this particular gossamer reality, the Eidolon and Umbra manifest themselves in potent forms as the eternal war rages on – order and science crystalize into strikingly more-perfect patterns, countered and besieged by staggeringly destructive entropic forces set to blow everything apart.

Aerion Prime is a gas giant planet, unique in that the upper layers of its atmosphere are habitable by humanoid life... when the weather's right. Such habitability is tenuous at best, as monstrously powerful super-storms constantly churn the atmosphere, dispersing the layers of oxygen and throwing dangerous plumes of caustic gases up into the thin and shifting habitable zones. "Stratospheria" is the name given to the entirely landless civilization that occupies Aerion Prime's habitable zone, comprised of thousands of loosely-affiliated nation states, business interests, outlaw territories, and assorted other groups who call the clouds their home. These groups constantly vie for scarce resources and secure airspace, struggling to survive in a world where dropping something means it's gone forever.

Advanced technology (strongly influenced by the Eidolon) is essential to keeping Stratospheria

afloat. Anti-gravitational field generators are an essential component of Aerion Prime's trademark ultra-light airships, comprise the foundations of the habitable zone's floating cities, and provide humanoid species some reprieve from the massive planet's punishing gravity. In a world without ground, everything must be plucked from the air; harvester ships do the dangerous work of gathering heavier elements from the clouds themselves, filtering millions of cubic meters of atmosphere just to cobble together the equivalent of a few handfuls of dirt – and then zipping away before a stray storm rips them to shreds. Solar energy arrays provide for the basic electrical needs of most technology above the clouds, but anti-gravitational field generators and most airship propulsion engines rely on fusion reactors fueled by deuterium harvested from the lower atmosphere.

Stratospherian civilization acquires some of its solid materials from off-planet, though the days of reliable resupply from space are a swiftly-fading memory. Fifty years ago, the forces of the Umbra scored a devastating victory by influencing two of Aerion Prime's largest moons to wobble in their orbits to such a degree that the two celestial bodies collided, fracturing into a vast asteroid belt which now clogs local space with deadly debris. A few expert pilots make supply runs to Aerion Prime in exchange for a hefty mark-up, and the galactic trading federation still sends rare envoys, but the rest of space-faring civilization beyond Aerion Prime's solar system has pretty much forsaken the Aerion system as a backwater wasteland.

Typical Denizens

The people of Stratospheria are scattered and heterogeneous, with hundreds of thousands of different groups and settlements spread out across a vast area. While Aerion Prime's habitable zone is relatively thin compared to the size of the planet, it has an effective surface area several hundred times that of an 'Earth'. A majority of the population is human, though there are plenty of humanoid alien races mixed in, adding to fascinating diversity in their fragile yet beautiful civilization-amongst-the-clouds. Regardless of their race or background, Stratospherians tend to be intelligent, tenacious survivors, which is unsurprising considering the demanding environmental conditions under which they live and the unforgiving consequences which befall the unlucky or incautious.

Humans on Stratospheria are mostly the descendants of colonists which first came to Aerion Prime a few hundred years ago, drawn to the allure of mining rare elements from the planet's clouds on behalf of a galactic trading empire that has recently abandoned Aerion Prime as a viable concern. Technological and expert professions are plentiful, with entire floating cities comprised of engineers, scientists, mechanics, and pilots. Those folks who weren't born on Aerion Prime tend to be there for less pleasant reasons, usually because they're running from something, be it their pasts, the law, or maybe just personal demons. In addition to colonial outposts and cloud-mining interests, Aerion Prime is home to numerous floating prisons and penal colonies designed to house problems the rest of the galaxy would rather forget. Filling their ranks with escapees and those left with nowhere else to turn, motley bands of sky pirates prowl the clouds,

raiding and scavenging for anything they can use to keep themselves afloat.

The raptori are humanoid aliens with distant avian ancestry, perfectly at home in the air even though their species hasn't flown on natural wings for millennia. Raptori have pale, nearly translucent skin, feathery white hair, and wide eyes typically colored violet, pink, or red. Extremely slim of frame to the point of appearing emaciated by human standards, their twig-like limbs sport wiry muscles laced over steel-strong hollow bones, and the short talon-like nails at the ends of their fingertips are wickedly sharp. Most raptori present on Aerion Prime came for work; their atmospheric scientists are beyond brilliant, and raptori pilots are some of the best in the business, known for their lightning-fast reflexes and keen navigational sense. While beautiful and highly skilled, raptori tend to be pessimistic and pragmatic to the point of cruelty, keeping only the company of those they deem competent and quick to leave a fool to die.

Jinn are ghostly, cloud-like aliens made up of sentient superclusters of nanorobots suspended in energized gas and held together by a person-sized force field. You know, regular guys. Whatever they used to be, the jinn long ago gave up corporeal form and uploaded their consciousnesses into these nanite-clouds, which are self-repairing and nearly immortal. Those few jinn who associate with human civilization remain strange and aloof, often communicating in riddles, rhymes, or cryptic supposedly-prophetic nonsense spoken in their creepy, robotic voices. While jinn can and do hover and even fly under calm conditions, they are loathe to roam the skies unprotected due to the threat of being blown apart by a strong wind, which is one of the few harms which could genuinely kill a jinn (or at least scatter one for a decade or two). The jinn's true reason for being on Stratospheria at all is mysterious – many believe they're waiting, watching, and searching for something hidden within the clouds.

Threats

Super-storms constantly roil across the surface of Aerion Prime, replete with lightning, acid rain, and several-hundred-knot winds that routinely obliterate any permanent structures with the ill luck to be caught below the upper

atmosphere for any length of time. While they remain entirely natural phenomena, these storms undoubtedly further the entropic interests of the Umbra through their churning chaos and unrelenting destruction.

Sky Pirates – no kidding. Aerion Prime is a brutal world where manufactured resources are scarce, and its more desperate inhabitants regularly resort to technological (and sometimes actual) cannibalism in order to keep themselves in the air. Equipped with grappling tethers, missiles, EMP charges, and even good-old-fashioned guns, these right and proper bastards will take your ship, your stuff, and your life without batting an eye. While I've never seen one the match for a Gossamer Lord, all they have to do is mess with your ride to turn a leisurely expedition into a fatal descent into the planet's crushing clouds.

"Cloud giants" resemble enormous floating blue-green jellyfish, but they're actually massive hybrid colonies of lighter-than-air microorganisms and photosynthetic cyanobacteria clumped together in big creepy symbiotic blobs. Each one has millions of long, wispy tentacles which can defend the colony by lashing, constricting, or stinging threats with bioelectrical discharges; and, when thoroughly agitated, a cloud giant can emit an electromagnetic pulse strong enough to cripple nearby airships. Cloud giants are beings of the Eidolon, thought to be the remnants of a failed (or at least stalled) attempt to terraform Aerion Prime despite impossible odds, producing oxygen through their photosynthesis and serving as floating forests in a landless realm. Even though they're supposedly mindless, cloud giants have been sighted congregating *en masse*, glowing like a fleet of hot-air balloons as they sing their keening, whale-like songs in eerie chorus.

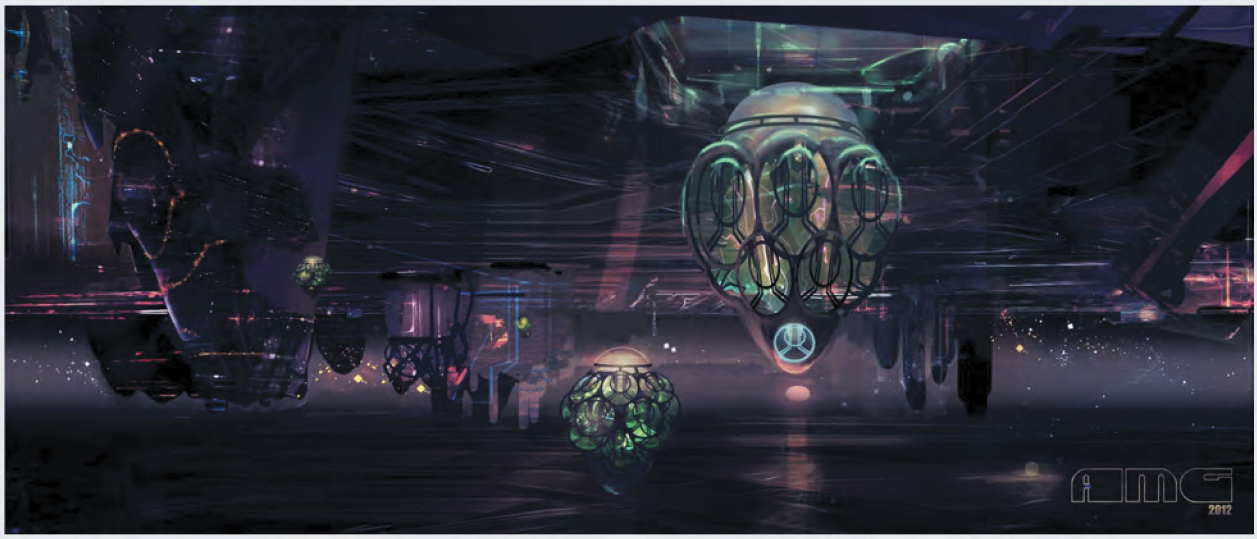
The Deep Gods dwell in the lower atmosphere of Aerion Prime, where supremely hostile conditions and intolerable pressures ensure their privacy. Speculation runs rampant about their true nature: bizarre alien angler-fish, hyper-intelligent psychic ghosts, or inscrutable black monoliths... the list goes on. Whatever they are, they're supposedly guarding an ancient Dwimmerlaik vault buried in the crushing depths near the planet's core. The contents of that vault must be unimaginably precious, dangerous, or both, since it lays hidden in one of the most secure and inaccessible locations in this or any galaxy.

Notable Locations

Zephyr's Landing is an immense floating city considered the *de facto* capital of Stratospheria. By far the largest single structure on Aerion Prime, the city houses just over a million souls and supports hundreds of industrial concerns, including hydroponic farms, rare element refineries, airship manufacturing, and one of the planet's few places where inbound spacecraft can dock. The city is a vital economic hub, either producing or serving as a point-of-sale for most physical goods traded in Stratospheria. While the city is overseen by a chief administrator acting with the support of an elected executive committee, practically Zephyr's Landing is an oligarchy run by powerful merchant-industrialists – all of whom compete for resources and profits, but remain united by the common imperative of cooperation for the sake of survival. Survival means keeping things orderly and efficient, so violence of any sort is harshly condemned and any feuding parties unable to settle their differences peacefully (or at least quietly) are sternly encouraged to "take it outside". The Door to Stratospheria opens out of a closet (containing pressure suits) into one of the city's many airlocks; once through the Door, the hatch to the right leads inside to an airship maintenance bay, and the hatch to the left leads outside to the open atmosphere and a thousand-mile drop.

The Raft is a wandering pirate city – a sprawling patchwork of lashed-together platforms, drastically modified airships, and any unrecognizable piece of scrap its inhabitants could weld to an anti-gravitational field generator. Home to thousands of sky pirates, the Raft is a rare island of camaraderie and respite for those with – literally – nowhere else to land. Roaming the skies just one step ahead of the storms and the law, the Raft's pirates maneuver their motley base within striking distance of ripe targets, launch their raiding ships, then drift away again into the infinite sea of clouds clutching their spoils. Might makes right on the Raft, and whomever declares themselves "pirate king" on any particular day had better have the moxy and the manpower to back the claim. Presently, that dubious honor belongs to Supreme Captain Ryk Falco, a sinister scoundrel with more greed than honor, only a shade more humane than the bloodthirsty cannibal he replaced. The coordinates of the Raft at any given moment is a closely guarded pirate secret, though their greatest deception is that there isn't just one – lesser gatherings of pirate ships also tout themselves to be "the Raft", sowing disinformation across Stratospheria and lending credence to the city's ominous and mysterious reputation.

SkyMax-616 is a maximum-security penitentiary, the last of a dying breed of mid-air prisons once popular with policy-makers of the galactic trading federation. Supremely well-funded and constructed with state-of-the-art technology, the facility was built to house inmates too dangerous (or valuable) to keep anywhere else. Run entirely by an artificial intelligence warden-system, the place is sterile, self-sufficient, and secure, defended by android guards and arrays of laser-turrets programmed to eradicate any



Domain	
Technology Level:	Fusion
Magic Level:	Unknown
Security:	Restricted Access [2 Points] (viable Doors are exceedingly scarce)
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (presently unclaimed by any Gossamer Lord)
Control:	None
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Strong Umbra – Strong Wrighting – Blocked
*Special:	N/A

solid object that comes within a kilometer of the prison without the proper clearance codes. Ultra-dangerous convicts are kept in deep cryogenic sleep, so the place is hauntingly quiet, however a few cells do house warm bodies there for other reasons, including one exiled emperor, a dozen or more VIP clones, and pair of twin children rumored to be the second coming of something the powers-that-be would prefer not come again. A friend of mine on the inside, a lifer named Ophelia Blue, has hacked herself enough loopholes and permissions in the system that she can move about the facility freely, so long as she never leaves. If you bring her a crate of red wine and a few hours of decent conversation, you'll earn a friend for life; and, if you see her, tell her Inmate Z7301 made it through that door.

Final Thoughts

Stratospheria is a realm of contradictions, showcasing the terrible tension that exists between the Umbra and the Eidolon as they carry on their ageless dance. The planet itself is beset by swirling storms of unimaginable violence, yet above that formless chaos, seemingly impossible shining cities float like brilliant jewels of technology and precision. The conflict wages internally as well, as people struggle to bring order to madness, or allow hunger to turn them into agents of decay and destruction. All this high theater is no accident – I think the universe wants us to pay attention to this gossamer world. A storm is coming, and the day will come when we all wish we knew a little bit more about what secrets lie within the clouds.

How to Use Stratospheria

- Stratospheria highlights the tension between the Eidolon and the Umbra in a setting where the stakes cannot be higher. This isn't just a world of flying ships and floating cities – it's a realm where all of civilization and life itself hangs by perilously slim yet undeniably brilliant threads of enlightenment and technology, literally dangling over a yawning, churning maw of storm and chaos incarnate. Use every opportunity to remind the characters of the infinite cosmic forces just barely concealed behind the gossamer curtains of this stage.

- Sky Pirates! Enjoy the thrills of stratospheric swashbuckling as the characters must evade and battle swarms of sky-scoundrels, then turn the tables on their pursuers. Simply blowing up enemy ships is wasteful and tasteless in a world where every bit of solid matter is as precious as gold – encourage the characters to board enemy vessels and engage in hand-to-hand combat, seizing and salvaging instead of simply destroying boring old blips on a screen.

- This high-flying setting blends together a host of genres – alien-encounter space adventure, piracy and perils at sea, and even subterranean delving in the roiling "underworld" beneath the clouds. One thing all these fantastic flavors have in common is the thrill and danger of exploration in a "natural" world that is both wondrous as any treasure, and more deadly than any villain. Take a few moments to put the characters on a tiny ship with an eccentric crew, racked by storms and set upon by raiders, slipping through a sea so immense that even a mighty Gossamer Lord must pause and reflect upon how tiny they are in the grand scheme of things.

- An ally hires the characters to stage a jailbreak from the elite penitentiary Skymax-616, freeing an anonymous Very Important Prisoner being held in cryogenic lockdown. Getting aboard the floating fortress past the Eidolon-infused AI security is challenging, and the inmates calling from the cells clamor with a host of red herrings, but when a security alarm triggers the emergency jettison of dozens of cryo-tubes, all of a sudden the name of the game is "catch".

- Don't fall! Remember that plunging hopelessly into the core of a gas giant is a really horrible fate that will put any definition of immortality to the test. Crushed by incredible pressures, corroded by acidic clouds, with all their gear blown off their bodies and scattered by super-hurricane winds, even a mighty Gossamer Lord might be unable to escape an unfortunate slip-and-fall into the bowels of Aerion Prime. So, since the slightest mishap or betrayal has the chance to be catastrophic, pay attention to the little things – and the little people.

- The Deep Gods guard an ancient Dwimmerlaik vault down in the crushing depths of the gas giant's core, and the secret buried there is one that will tear the multiverse apart. Over the course of a campaign, rumors and omens from dozens of Gossamer worlds all point to a weapon of unimaginable power. The final clue provides a map to the dark heart of Aerion Prime, but impenetrable wards ensure that the only way to reach this vault of legend is the hard way. What is in the vault? A book? A seed? A ghost whispering the true name of the Grand Stair itself?

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Verse Arcanum

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Verse Arcanum

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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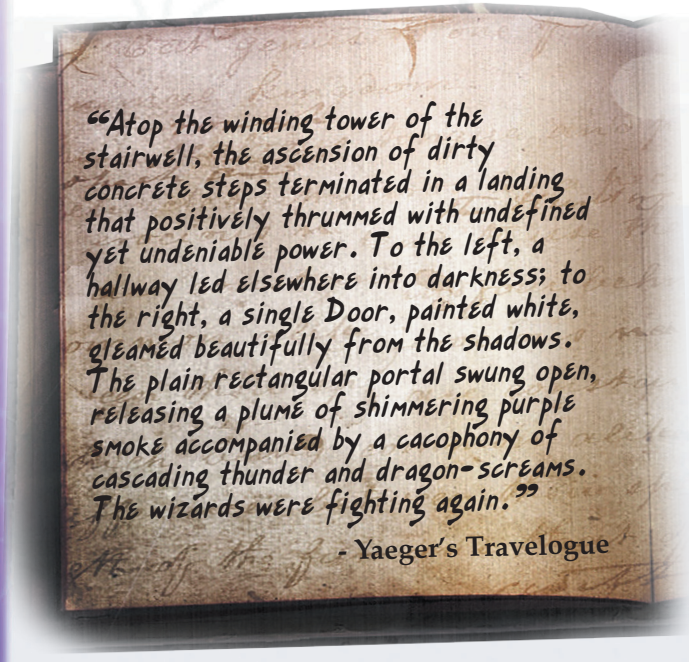

The Verse Arcanum is an entire gossamer universe brimming over with magical energy – a fantastic realm of giants and dragons, fell prophecy and faerie fire. Also known reverently as the Realm of Towers, jokingly as Wizard World, or simply as "the Verse", the realm's abundance of mystical power makes it a natural laboratory, playground, and battleground for practitioners of Sorcery and other arcane arts. The existence of the Verse Arcanum is widely known throughout the Grand Stair, and it has long been a popular haunt and common ground for Gossamer Lords and other, older, eldritch forces.

While typically such a desirable resource-rich territory would produce inevitable and acrimonious conflict between covetous claimants, the Verse Arcanum has the rare quality of being claimed by many but monopolized by none. Whereas most Gossamer worlds can be "owned" as a Domain by only one Gossamer Lord at a time, in the Verse Arcanum the dominance of a Gossamer Lord is a localized effect centered around a single focal point – a Tower. It is impossible to hold more than one Tower at a time (though folks *have* tried), but attempts at building multiple Towers produce only mundane structures, and seizing the Tower of another Lord requires relinquishing one's previous holding lest both crumble to ruin.

All Towers are tall, narrow, impressive structures, but each one is as unique as its owner and Gossamer Lords love to bend the rules. I've seen creative floor plans including an entirely underground stack of sub-basements a mile deep, a towering cascade of frozen waterfalls, and somewhere out there in Verse Arcanum space there's a crystalline shard the size of a moon orbiting a self-aware psychic star. Towers typically contain the owner's opulent living quarters, a well-equipped laboratory, a library or twelve, and the insane kinds of death traps and security measures your average paranoid world-hopping demigod might conjure up for their inner sanctum when left alone with a blank slate and an unlimited budget for sorcery. My own glorious Tower has a zero-gravity solarium, a protective perimeter of buxom succubi-gargoyles,

and a winged unicorn paddock in the back forty. And, yes, since you asked nicely, when you visit you *may* ride one.

Each Tower is surrounded by a roughly circular region of aligned territory called the *demesne*. Demesnes vary in size according to the power of each owner, though few extend more than a league from the base of their respective Tower; as such, since there's an entire universe out there to occupy, demesnes rarely abut each other unless a newcomer makes the foolhardy decision to stake a claim right on someone else's lawn. The gossamer reality of the demesne surrounding each Tower alters to suit the owner, whether crafted deliberately or influenced unconsciously – nearby inhabitants conform to the expectations of the local Lord, the environment shifts according to their mood, and even the laws of physics can warp if the Lord gets riled up. While anything goes inside a Lord's Tower, the ability to shape gossamer reality within the demesne is not completely *carte blanche* – the Verse Arcanum is a realm of magic, not technology, and nothing requiring gunpowder or electricity is likely to work or last outside of a Tower.

The "wild" territory in between demesnes, capable of being traveled, enjoyed, and utilized by any Gossamer Lord, defaults to the natural fantastical terrain – enchanted forests, haunted hills, mountains of doom and whatnot – ruled and occupied by the realm's indigenous inhabitants. Magic infuses every aspect of the environment, from the flora and fauna to the sky and beyond; speaking stones and enchanted woods are everywhere, overseen by fanciful inhabitants including everything from spritely fey to grumpy dragon-turtles. Two-faced elves stalk the ancient groves and coal-hearted dwarves hammer away beneath the mountains, while in every human village a great hero might soon be born.

Typical Denizens

While many of the peoples of the Verse Arcanum may seem familiar from the fairy tales and ancient legends of a thousand other worlds, it bears mention that nothing here is benign, and even the lowliest of commoners likely knows someone who knows the way of spell and curse, making even the most mundane of encounters potentially dire, or downright deadly.

Humans thrive in the Verse Arcanum, seeded across the myriad worlds in varied races and cultures, though when it comes to power and opportunity they tend to be a mixed bag of haves and have-nots. In some kingdoms, squalid medieval villages cower in the shadow of mages' towers, full of superstitious peasants desperate to be spared their master's power-mad wrath, the predations of nearby monsters, or both. Elsewhere, great cities of men shine atop impossible peaks or gather around enchanted desert oases, packed with city folk who lust for magical treasure and covet the concentrated mystical wealth of local heroes. When it comes to humans, fate and genetics are better indicators of magical aptitude than culture or training; child prodigies spring up all the time, often according to some prophecy or another, and often in a traumatic, life-altering eruption of power. Nevertheless, those who don't have mojo crave it all the same, and human-run schools of wizardry are never lacking in students aspiring to be the next chosen one.

Elves in the Verse Arcanum are eerie, inscrutable creatures following a dualistic philosophy that serves both the Eidolon and the Umbra. It's strange – in a way, *all* elves here are "light elves" and "dark elves" at the same time, though the expression of this dualism varies from tribe to tribe. Elves may build an orderly city of idyllic perfection and tend its pristine gardens for a hundred years, only to celebrate its centennial by razing it to the ground in a fortnight of depravity, destruction, and death. Some elves are truly two-faced, sporting two-toned skin, or wearing moon-themed ritual masks designating which eternal force they're serving at a given moment. I once met a tribe of elves, which I thought lawful and civilized, only to learn that the twisted, ravenous freaks who prowled their borders were the tribal elders who had passed on into the umbral stage of their lives... in proper traditional fashion. Elves worship nature in cyclical aspects such as the lunar phases, the tides, or the life-and-death churn of the seasons, and while I can respect the yin-and-yang cosmic balance of their philosophy, watching it in action is unsettling. The other races in the Verse Arcanum typically shun and distrust these alien, unpredictable elves, and I don't blame them. Elven magic is primal and crazy powerful, spun directly from the friction between Eidolon and Umbra; elven spells are notoriously difficult to dispel or deflect, and elven coven-curses are as certain a doom as ever there was.

Dwarves are prolific in the Verse Arcanum, divided into a multitude of related races and sub-species such as gnomes, munchkins, stonelings, and half-folk (though don't ever let on that I've lumped them all together, that'll earn you a pick-axe in the knee). Staunchly aligned with the Eidolon, dwarves believe in the pursuit of ideal form and constantly strive to reveal the patterns of true perfection in every object they shape; for them, craftsmanship is not merely a work ethic, but a religious calling. The quality of dwarven arms and armor is beyond compare, as their techniques weave matter and magic to produce qualities of sharpness, hardness, and durability surpassing anything made by so-called "technology" on other Gossamer worlds. My own beloved golden spear is dwarf-forged, and I solemnly believe that the Grand Stair will crumble into dust before that thing goes dull. Dwarven creativity ranges far beyond weaponry – stoneling architecture makes the impossible practical; gnomish ships traverse sea, sky, and space effortlessly; and munchkin cooking is so divine the little darlings can cure blood-curses with a bowl of snapdragon soup. Not all dwarves create in celebration of the Eidolon – some destroy in service to the Umbra. In the lightless underworld, the null-forges of the *dvergrs* can unmake anything... artifacts, souls, even immortals.

Dozens of other races populate the Verse Arcanum's various kingdoms and sub-realms, either in concentrated enclaves or scattered throughout. Animal-folk stalk the wilds, practicing savage blood-magic and guarding their ancestral lands. Giants rule the highest mountain peaks and mist-shrouded hinterlands, longing for the halcyon days of a cyclopean empire long since faded from mortal memory. Fey frolic around hidden toadstool rings or scheme from the shadows to steal babies, trick apprentices, or whatever it is that they do. No matter their size or shape, every being in the Verse Arcanum

is defined by their relationship to magic – those who lack it crave it, those who wield it worship it, and those who master it rule like gods.

Threats

Wizards are everywhere, harnessing the power of magic in hundreds of different ways: sorcery, geomancy, divination, evocation, thaumaturgy, witchcraft... the list goes on. Some are mere dabblers, but more than a few wield sufficient power to stand their ground against one of us in a battle of blasts and counterspells. Of particular concern is the Maegistirium, a conspiracy of powerful archmages who've caught on to the existence of the Grand Stair and resent we Gossamer Lords as extra-dimensional carpetbaggers trashing *their* reality with gaudy towers and reckless displays of power. While hurtful, I'll admit that's not inaccurate, though they're intent on capturing a Gossamer Lord for interrogation and magical vivisection, so I don't think we're all going to be friends.

Spell-Eaters are malevolent spirits which, you guessed it, eat spells. One would think that in a realm overflowing with magical energy, they'd have plenty to nibble, but no, they only go after the finest, most concentrated mystic delicacies – enchanted weapons, objects holding hanging spells, and spellcasters themselves. Spell-Eaters enter and possess the body of a magical practitioner, simultaneously leeching the host body dry (until death) while using the host's power and abilities to hunt and bring down juicy mystic morsels and further prey. Possession by a spell-eater temporarily augments the inherent abilities of the host, so the spirits have a knack for stair-stepping their way up the sorcerous food chain, up to and including the top. Possession by a spell-eater causes the host's eyes to rot into black pits, so if you see a colleague approaching you with hollow sockets, run.

Heroes are everywhere, and they are *annoying*. At first I thought I'd be sympathetic – they're adventurers, I'm an adventurer; they're gifted little snowflakes, I'm a gifted little snowflake. But there's something about getting smited (smote? smitten?) in the face by a beefy holier-than-thou paladin that really makes me willing to be hypocritically cranky. Keep them away from your Tower, your treasure, and pray they don't fixate upon you as the next Big Bad Evil.

Wyrms are forces of nature in an unnatural realm. These terrifying serpentine behemoths resemble dragons in many respects, but calling a wyrm a dragon is like patting a saber-toothed tiger on the head and calling it 'kitty'. Whereas your stereotypical dragon has wings, scales, and breathes fire, a wyrm lofts its miles-long body by the power of sorcery alone, armors itself in eldritch

A Different Hocus Pocus

The Verse Arcanum contains hundreds of rich and different magical traditions. Instead of creating new rules for each one, use existing mechanics: Invocation has rules for calling, summoning, compulsion, and binding; Wrighting provides a template for mystic communication, teleportation, and sympathetic magic; and Cantrips and Sorcery spells are written broadly to encompass a myriad of expressions.

substances like blistering lava or prismatic force, and lays waste with gouts of molten holy silver, freezing purple starlight, or annihilating torrents of pure corruption. Some, such as the haughty, golden-horned Heliopherox, serve the Eidolon as overseers and guardians; others, such as the world-eating Orobu-Na-Quetza, do the work of the Umbra by consuming entire continents for lunch. Possessing genius-levels intellects and eons worth of acquired artifacts and spellcasting experience, wyrms are the true power of the Verse Arcanum, and do not take kindly to a challenge.

Notable Locations

The above-mentioned denizens are not confined to a single terrestrial globe, since the Verse Arcanum sees fit not to operate in concepts so mundane as nice round planets. Testament to the infinite variety and variability of gossamer reality, "worlds" in the Verse Arcanum are immense flat land masses floating in the infinite ethereal void while their patron sun-gods and attendant moon-women circle around at the pace of whatever great cosmic beasts pull their chariots. Most of the Gossamer Lords I know have their Towers and interests on a verdant, mountainous super-continent called Uru-Aum, but Lucien teases that he has files on realms largely unmapped. A vast carnage-strewn battleground full of thrice-cursed warriors, a starry world-tree with entire celestial civilizations nestled amongst its branches, and a treacherous faerie realm from which no outsider has ever returned. Private pocket-dimensions and more esoteric sub-realms drift about in the ether as well, acting as closets for powerful wizards or as prisons for ancient threats. Travel between Uru-Aum and other worlds within the Verse Arcanum is feasible by teleportation, mystic portal, specially-ensorcelled flying mount, dwarven ether-ship, or a network of so-called rainbow "bridges" which *I* would describe as "psychedelic prismatic bullet-trains without brakes, seat belts, or pity." Though these mysterious destinations may seem tempting, I wouldn't recommend venturing too far from the nearest known Door without a solid survival strategy and as much mystical mojo as you can carry.

The Witch's Spine is the longest, tallest mountain range on Uru-Aum, full of rich enchanted mineral deposits and covered in a crosshatch of potent ley lines. Several Gossamer Lords have sited their Towers along the range, capping easily defensible peaks or tucked away in lush valleys – never too close, but at a few popular junctions you can waive to your neighbor if the sky is clear and your eyesight is keen. Faerie circles and ancient megaliths dot the surrounding highlands, and in the stretches between demesnes you'll find wizard-ruled castles, buried dwarven forge-works, and roving stone giant tribes with a penchant for haruspicy and painting themselves blue.

The current Door to the Verse Arcanum opens into the pegasi stables of Red Cauldron Keep, the mountaintop home of Phineas Redpot, a doddering gnome alchemist (and likely Maegistirium spy) who pretends to be too senile and decrepit to notice the comings and goings of strange visitors from his property.

Barrowborn's Academy of Enchantment and the Necromantic Arts used to be Uru-Aum's most well-attended school for the mystic arts, accepting hundreds of fresh-faced apprentices each year and producing some of the Verse Arcanum's finest enchanters, all under the wizened eye of Eternal Headmaster Juniper Barrowborn, the kindliest old lich you'd ever meet. That was before the curse, and the fire, and the massacre. Now the Academy is a soot-stained tomb, its dormitories filled with charred corpses and its halls infested with scavenging spell-eaters come to suck the mystic marrow from its bones. A tortured, half-mad Barrowborn still haunts the grounds searching for any clue that might unravel the mystery of who betrayed the Academy, and give the lich that which he most desperately craves: a target for his unholy vengeance.

Final Thoughts

The Verse Arcanum is a place of enchantment and wonder, its doors open wide to all of the possibilities that magic allows. In my experience, however, "magical" rarely equates to "good". Respect local superstitions, fear dragons, and never ever *ever* eat anything recommended to you by someone with pointy ears.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Medieval/Other (advanced magical innovation)
Magic Level:	Magic Nullifies Technology
Security:	Varies according to each Tower/demesne
Type:	Common Ground [2 Points] (multiple simultaneous owners)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to one's own demesne)
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Strong Umbra – Strong Wrighting – Easy
*Special:	Magical energy is super-abundant in the Verse Arcanum; most uses of Sorcery require only half the usual time and effort, and Cantrips do not drain a caster's vitality at all. Also, the Verse Arcanum can be (and is) claimed by multiple Gossamer Lords simultaneously, with each individual owner occupying and controlling one (and only one) Tower and surrounding demesne.

How to Use Verse Arcanum

- Verse Arcanum is a highly mystical realm, perfect for exulting in the familiar tropes of classic fantasy or diverging off into wild realms of the alien and unknown. Play at being a wizard-king, cavort with faeries, or quest to rescue enchanted treasures from the hoards of dragons. With an unlimited assortment of regions, this single Gossamer world can serve as an ample stage for epic adventures without even having to return to the Grand Stair at all... for a while.

- Verse Arcanum is a well-known common ground for travelers of the Grand Stair, with the lofty Towers of many Gossamer Lords dotting the fantastical landscape. While some of these Towers may be secretive fortresses, many (if not most) are more like vacation homes designed for relaxation and socialization. This fantastical "neighborhood" of lords and Towers is the perfect place to set meetings between the powerful, as mentors, allies, and even enemies might invite the characters to visit their Tower for a tea on the balcony while storms of flying frogs roll by.

- Towers are a great way for the characters to express themselves and enjoy the thrill of building their own super-special home base. In this magic-rich world of fantasy nearly anything is possible, so let imaginations run wild! Then, once the characters have decorated, the threat of attack by wyrms or heroes will keep them invested in defending their cherished homestead.

- Kidnapped! The archmages of the Maegistirium have enough power to genuinely threaten a Gossamer Lord, and they're keenly interest in capturing one of these mysterious interlopers for interrogation and dissection. The characters are ambushed with debilitating curses and insidious bindings, finding themselves surrounded by cruel, iron-willed wizards intent on learning everything they can about the secrets of the Grand Stair. Will they spill their guts?

- Dragons are scary, and the wyrms of Verse Arcanum are intended to be super-dragons on a scale to gobble up even a powerful Gossamer Lord. Should the characters confront one of these miles-long behemoths, they really should fear for their lives. Give them a deadly challenge.

- Get philosophical. Remember that "magic" isn't just about nifty spells and enchanting effects – it's about *power*. Magic brings with it the power to build great works and change the world drastically, and such power begs the question of how it is to be used, and by whom. When all things are possible and reality bends to the will of the powerful, the motives and morals of the powerful become even more important than the particular method by which they've harnessed such power. What is the difference between wizards who use their powers for "good" or for "evil"? Since magic allows a powerful few to dominate the lesser masses, is magic itself a tool of oppression? Of all the mystical traditions, is any one of the them truer than the others?

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Ossuary Empire

by Matt Banach

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"The broken hallway twisted through the darkness like a shattered bone set badly. The dirty concrete of the Stair before had faded into memory with the shadows, replaced in this expanse with lush burgundy carpets and walls of pale, dry limestone, which gave a sense of ancient luxury and eternal power. Flickering candles set in brass alcoves illuminated the hallway, leading to a smooth, clean stretch with one wall higher than the other. The Door thereupon was made of ruddy sandalwood, inlaid with gold and ivory in an intricate pattern, which made me think of dying in the desert. It was beautiful, but hardly welcoming. Recalling what lay beyond, I clutched my reliquary and hoped the beast might still be sleeping.

- **Yaeger's Travelogue**

'The Ossuary Empire' is a rough but apt translation of *Sahr Astudan*, which means more literally 'the kingdom of the places where the bones of the dead are kept' in this realm's native tongue, which is akin to the ancient Persian dialects of other Earth-like Gossamer worlds. It is a land of winding caravans and ancient monuments, its cities of sun-bleached stone holding beggar-prince thieves, mysterious merchants, and auspicious kings. Here, the gods are dead, but their bones remain the ultimate power.

As usual, to understand what is now, it is essential to understand what came before. This realm was once ruled by a pantheon of powerful beings called the dîv. The *dîv* were paragons of the Eidolon – their forms perfect, their ability to impose order supreme – but they became an example of what can happen when the Eidolon overtakes a reality, crystalizing power perhaps a little bit *too much*. Since the dawn of their time, the power-hungry *dîv* conquered all, consumed all, and became the source of all, concentrating mystical energy in themselves – in their very bodies – to such a degree that magic drained and faded from the mortal world entirely. With the rest of the realm starving for power, the miserly, controlling *dîv* dispensed their embarr-assment of riches in exchange for exorbitant obeisances – granting wishes like genies, bestowing miracles upon the faithful, and threatening humanity with plagues and doom whenever they got cross. There was order, sure, but that didn't make it right.

Then, suddenly, it all went sideways. The *dîv* turned on each other, their ancient rivalries and petty bickering suddenly transformed into lethal vendettas. The precipitating event might've been many things: a tricksy Umbra-inspired usurper-figure with daddy issues, a final critical failure of mortal faith, or the radically disruptive revelation of the Grand Stair to an established cosmology... the theories are many, but the result is the same. The *dîv* fell into an unrelenting civil war, and in so doing slaughtered each other to the very last.

The War of Deicide raged for centuries, claiming the lives of millions of mortals and hundreds of immortals. Pawn armies clashed on the terrestrial battlefield while divine duels spilt holy blood from the heavens. The pantheon shrank and those *dîv* who had survived the initial hostilities grew desperate, wielding forbidden artifacts and unleashing long-imprisoned demons. The most desperate *dîv* discovered (or perhaps remembered) the curiosity of the Grand Stair and sought reinforcements from beyond their Gossamer World, hiring contract killers from distant realms and equipping their armies with whatever otherworldly weapons could be smuggled in through the Doors. The war escalated as caliphs fell under the plasma-knives of cybernetic assassins and scimitar-wielding dervishes got mowed down by foot-soldiers with AK-47s. More *dîv* perished, and the pantheon dwindled. In the end, at the culmination and ultimate tipping point of it all, the final two *dîv* – a pair of feuding brothers, one light, one dark – met in the great eastern desert. The two did battle for a year and a day, cracking open mountains and boiling the clouds, fighting over who would rule the world and form a new pantheon for the age to come.

Then somebody nuked 'em.

We don't know who detonated the neutron bomb, or who smuggled it in, or which Gossamer World it came from. It might've been one of the *dîv* resolving to end the war via fratricide-suicide, one of their foolhardy lieutenants grasping for an ace in the hole, or perhaps a cadre of mortals saw their best chance for freedom and took it. The point is, the *dîv* are dead – every last one.

The final death knell of the *dîv*, referred to as 'the Blinding Sunset', did many things, but one thing it didn't do was release magic back into the world. Turns out the *dîv* were such gluttons for power that, even in death, their stubborn, selfish bodies refused to give up the energy crystalized within their bones. However, just because that energy could no longer be transferred didn't mean that it couldn't be used. Priests and zealots weeping over their fallen deities sensed the power locked within the gigantic corpses and noted they could still perform minor miracles whilst in contact with the remains of the *dîv's* corporeal form. *Now that the gods were dead, their bones were the ultimate power.* This revelation triggered a morbid yet undeniably pragmatic frenzy of deific disinterment and grave-robbing. If that seems base or barbaric to you, let me put it this way: imagine a technologically well-to-do world full of computers and electric light plunged into blackout, then consider the astronomical value of the last fully-charged batteries left on the planet. Such is as it was and as it is now in *Sahr Astudan*, a land now defined by the ossified power of *dîvnbone*.

Dîvnbone has many properties that make it supremely useful and infinitely valuable. Steeped in the static perfection of the Eidolon, *dîvnbone* artifacts resist change, remaining unsusceptible to "editing" by the Eidolon and immune to the corruption of the Umbra.

Weapons made from it tend to be simply formed – clubs, spears, swords, knives, and stakes – because shaping the stuff is insanely difficult, requiring *dîvnbone* tools as well as a fair amount of dark mystic know-how. Physically, *dîvnbone* is harder than diamonds and sharper than steel. In terms of magical energy, it acts like a mystic battery, not only storing the energy it absorbed when the *dîv* were alive but also continually sucking in ambient mystical mojo. This draining effect perpetually replenishes the *dîvnbone* as it is used, but also gives objects crafted from it the potential to act as foils to magical effects – *dîvnbone* weapons can pierce magical protections, *dîvnbone* shields can resist sorcerous blasts, and *dîvnbone* helms can block psychic attacks (in addition to looking totally badass).

Drawing mystic energy *out* of stingy, thirsty *dîvnbone* for use in spells or whatnot usually requires the possessor of an artifact to 'warm it up' in a ritual process which varies from item to item depending on the *dîv* from whence it came; submerging it in the waters of an oasis, basking it in noonday sunlight, or coating it in blood fresh from a kill – that kind of thing. Even dead, the *dîv* are finicky and demand tribute, which is more than a little creepy.

Dîvnbone Artifacts

Dîvnbone artifacts have the following qualities: Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] (Enables use of magical Powers within the Ossuary Empire when ritually appeased; drains and absorbs magical energy)

Capable of Hanging a Spell [1 Point]
-and-
Deadly Damage [4 Points] (if a weapon)
-or-
Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points] (if shield or armor)

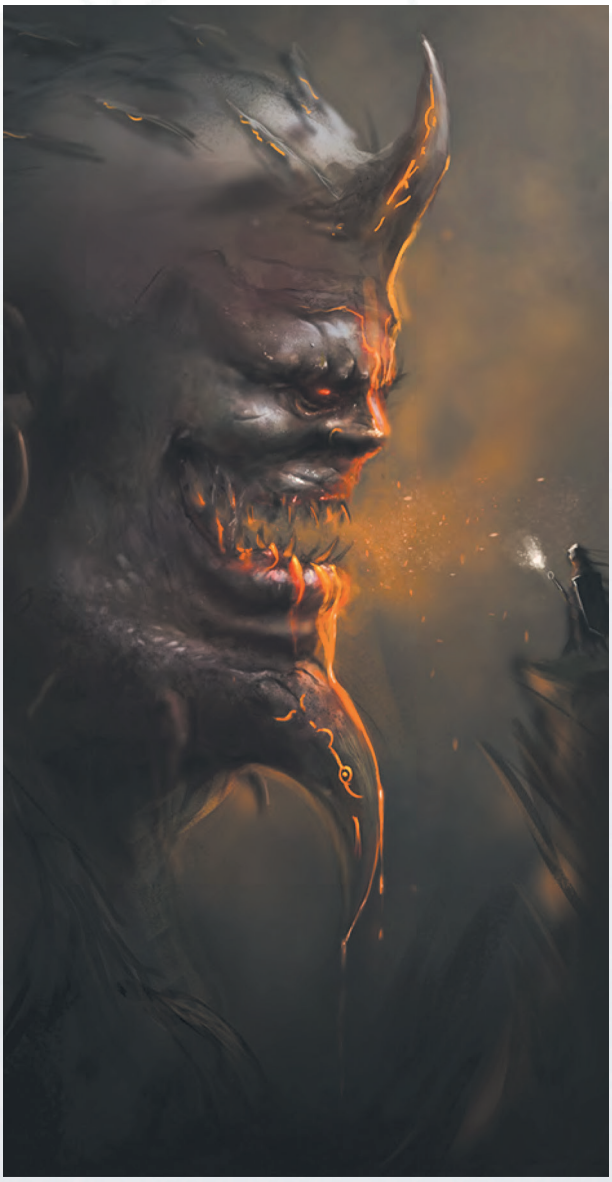
To say that *dîvnbone* is sought-after in the Ossuary Empire is a woeful understatement. Holding even the smallest *dîvnbone* weapon or reliquary is enough to become a target for warlords, thieves, or assassins, all of which are plentiful in *Sahr Astudan*. While the black market for artifacts, weapons, and reliquaries remains robust, powerful sorts tend to hoard the stuff, creating a new class of overlords seeking to fashion themselves the new demi-gods.

The Ossuary Empire runs on classical and medieval technology – aqueducts and alchemy, wagons and windmills – but aberrantly advanced gizmos pop up here and there. The War of Deicide ended with the Blinding Sunset a hundred years ago, ceasing the haphazard importation of extra-dimensional weaponry via the Grand Stair. Most items have long since crumbled into useless disrepair, but the more durable goods persist, reminding us that this is a reality forever tainted by overexposure to the worlds beyond – tribal warriors brandish weathered rifles, palace guards cling to extant suits of bio-armor, and the Diamond Padishah makes a regular show of touring his empire in an immaculately-maintained post-fusion ornithopter. While widely acknowledged as expedient by the militant elite, the continued use of these foreign devices is taboo to most Astudani, who (rightly) blame these alien influences for the eradication of their gods and the ruination of their world.

"Post-apocalyptic" is an apt term for the Ossuary Empire overall, though said ruination is extensive in some places and more mitigated in others. While there are plenty of different types of terrain across this otherwise Earth-like world – sandy deserts, craggy mountains, grassy steppes – most environs tend to be harsh and arid on account of the ecological damage and permanent climate changes brought on by the War of Deicide. Though the war has been over for a hundred years, nature still hasn't fully recovered and areas once thought temperate suffer punishing droughts, epic dust storms, and sudden snap-freezes. Even the distant seas are in turmoil, over-salinated from the tears of the *dîv* and risen high above historical levels due to the melting of the polar ice caps. The realms' beautiful coastal cities simply don't exist anymore, eradicated by storms, flooding, and constant tidal waves, leaving only the high inland expanses for mankind to tread.

Typical Denizens

Humans populate the Ossuary Empire in the typical vast variety, running the gamut from simple nomadic herdsmen and common street-beggars to extravagant sultans and worldly



merchant-kings. Now, I'll be honest, the last time I visited this realm my focus was less on demographics and more on not getting shivved in the neck with a pointy deific metacarpal, so please forgive my coarse understanding of these fine people.

The "city folk" of *Sahr Astudan* congregate in the remaining great urban centers, drawn to the rekindled fires of the grand bazaars which maintain the hope that civilization in this punished land is not lost. Trading goods out in the bandit-riddled countryside is dangerous, so farmers and craftsmen depend on these sprawling marketplaces (packed with guards and thief-takers) to vend their goods – everything from goats-meat kabobs to war-elephants, and even hand-made bullets for strange guns that aren't even supposed to exist in this world. The bazaars are noisy, smelly, and chaotic, not to mention lousy with beggars, pickpockets, and cut-purses, but there's no better symbol of the vibrancy and tenacity of human existence. At least, I thought so the last time I had to chase a street urchin across the rooftops to retrieve my pilfered sidearm.

"Desert folk" as I use the term applies to anyone living in the hardscrabble wilds of *Sahr Astudan,* though the terrains vary far beyond mere dunes of sand. There are the proud horse-lords of the Sizdah Steppe, whose favorite sport is a mix of polo and rugby, using the severed head of an outlander for a ball. There are the secretive mountain tribes, generous with their hospitality (and potent psyche-expanding drugs) if you can ever enter their nigh-impenetrable highland strongholds. Most notable are the enigmatic desert striders, prophetic nomads galvanized by their belief that the murder-suicide of the *dîv* was their final blessing to mankind, their chosen successors – and any beings threatening to eclipse humanity ever again must be eradicated accordingly.

Threats

The Diamond Padishah rules the Ossuary Empire from the ancient throne-city of Parsa, commanding the obedience and loyalty of millions of citizens spread across thousands of leagues of the remaining civilized world. The story goes that he began as a minor noble and alchemist but was the first to snatch up *dîvnbone* in large quantities, gaining a staggering advantage in power before the rest of the world caught on.

Decked out from head to toe in a full suit of glittering *dîvnbone* armor and equipped with an impressive arsenal of weapons (both *dîvnbone* and otherworldly ordnance from War of Deicide), the Padishah is without a doubt the most powerful single person on the planet. He typically cloisters himself behind legions of guards, but occasionally demonstrates his power with public stunts like pulverizing stone pillars with his fists or conjuring fire-cyclones out of thin air.

He's not terrible, as far as super-powered dictators go, considering that he *has* brought civilization back from the brink of total collapse; but he's shrewd, suspicious, and dangerously

unforgiving when it comes to anything threatening his grasp on power. If you must deal with him, bring a gift, and make it good.

The hashashin – yup, the legendary league of assassins – were deeply enriched by the War of Deicide, gaining vast wealth in blood money while simultaneously augmenting their ancient killing arts with equipment and techniques brought in from strange worlds beyond the Grand Stair. Hundreds of extra-dimensional assassins joined ranks with the local hashashin over the wartime years as a cover for their activities, and dozens of these hardened killers remain on-world to this day. *These are the people you really have to watch out for.* The secret masters of Alamut have an arrangement-of-sorts with the Diamond Padishah, their best customer: the Padishah hires assassins to kill rival wielders of *dîvnbone* and harvest their stuff; the assassins do so, skimming *dîvnbone* relics from each haul in addition to their steep fees; and both parties smile and pretend they don't know what the other is doing. This arrangement is expedient at the present, until the inevitable day when it isn't.

The Nephilim proclaim themselves the 'children of the gods', though it isn't true; if anything, they were pets. When the *dîv* perished, these monsters slipped their ancient bonds and gnawed at the corpses of their former masters, seizing the power they'd always coveted. Nephilim aren't just users of *dîvnbone*, they've bonded themselves with it, fusing themselves with *dîv* skeletons or parts thereof in gruesome but powerful amalgamations. There's Shah-ghul the Emperor Worm, an enormous serpentine larva grafted into an entire spinal column; Gug the Horned, a giant who fancies itself some sort of genie; and 'the Child', a bobble-headed psychic phenom who's grown its dangerous brain to fill a *dîv* skull twice its size. The Nephilim are disorganized and usually pursue their own monstrous agendas, but they all blame extradimensional "poison" for the destruction of their beloved masters and harbor a deep hatred for off-worlders. Aware of the existence of the Grand Stair but unable to venture out upon it, several Nephilim guard the known Doors to the Ossuary Empire with the goal of keeping outsiders out and every precious fragment of *dîvnbone* in.

Setare is an ultra-potent cocktail of exotic drugs and pulverized *dîvnbone* which grants those who ingest it freakish psychic powers, disturbing messianic psychoses, and glowing white eyes that glitter like stars. I might've seen such a thing, once upon a moonlit desert night, but the nice big truck that hit me suggested I'd be better off forgetting the whole incident, and I'm inclined to agree.

Notable Locations

Parsa is the capital city of *Sahr Astudan*, a stone-hewn metropolis of ancient beauty teetering on the verge of either crumbling to sand or rising as a beacon of civilization in a world pulling itself back from the brink of apocalypse. The Grand Bazaar of Parsa is, without a doubt, the center of this world in terms of trade, power, and secrets, ceaselessly bustling in the long shadow

Domain	
Technology Level:	Medieval/Other (leftover tech from the Wars of Deicide)
Magic Level:	Magic is Rare (and requires *dîvnbone*, see Special)
Security:	Guarded [4 Points] (by the Nephilim)
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: The Diamond Padishah)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Weak Umbra – Weak Wrighting – Average
*Special:	Supernatural power in this realm is highly concentrated in the remnants of the *dîv*, and thoroughly depleted elsewhere. Effective use of any Power requires possession of a *dîvnbone* weapon or reliquary.

of the Padishah's palace, which dominates the city skyline with its hundreds of minarets and dozens of golden domes. The current Door to the Ossuary Empire is hidden in booby-trapped catacombs deep below the city, opening from a small limestone crypt into an immense cavern inhabited by that smug bastard Gug the Horned. Gug has taken to demanding a toll of one life for every life he lets through – and no, he doesn't accept animals any more... sorry, I used that one and ruined it for everybody.

Alamut Castle has been the mountain fortress of the hashashin for a thousand years and remains the most closely guarded and staggeringly deadly enclave in this entire world. The assassins' headquarters is full of zealous initiates, hardened killers, wizened masters, and more than a few thinly veiled aliens. Off-world technology abounds there, as the death-dealers supplement their training in the usual knife-work and poisoning with grenades and sniper rifles. While the secret masters of the hashashin once enjoyed the convenience of a Door occurring within the confines of their keep, a recent Gossamer Lord-related debacle severed said connection, and they're looking for someone to blame.

The Sea of Black Glass is a wasteland, all that remains of the great eastern desert after the neutron bomb of the Blinding Sunset irradiated every oasis and baked the sands into a mirror of cracked obsidian. It looks desolate, but it isn't. The desert striders step lightly across its shattered surface, searching for fragments of the last two dîv as they chase a prophecy which portends the ascension – and transformation – of all mankind.

Final Thoughts

The Ossuary Empire is grand, adventurous, and tantalizingly forbidden, but I won't be going back there. The entire realm smells like a tomb to me, no matter strong the desert wind or how thick the smoke of ruin, and the rasp of its sand underfoot fills me with a dread that I can feel in my bones.

~ Yaeger Zane

How to Use The Ossuary Empire

- *Sahr Astudan* is a post-apocalyptic realm, sure, but one where the promise of a new destiny is bright enough to light the way through the fascinating rubble of the world-that-was. Just as the Eidolon and Umbra wrestle back and forth, here the past and the future battle for control of the present. For every ruined city or blasted wasteland visited, make sure to highlight the blossoms of radical new civilization growing out of the bones of the old regime. Life springs anew!

- *Dîvnbone* is insanely precious, and its use must never be regarded lightly. While a character might enjoy the boost of power a *dîvnbone* artifact provides in this Gossamer world, the cost of possessing even the smallest shard of this holy substance is to be under constant scrutiny and threat – hounded by fanatics, targeted by assassins, and stalked by hungry Nephilim. Beware.

- The War of Deicide seeded this Gossamer world with all kinds of incongruous stuff, so enjoy combining the tropes of an ancient desert kingdom with splashes of futuristic technology and otherworldly influence. Imagine the tales of Aladdin and Sinbad if they stumbled upon a crate of space marine artillery, or Scheherazade wrapped in the folds of enchanted dragon-skin.

- The characters must locate a world-hopping killer who has been hiding himself among the Ossuary Empire's mysterious hashashin. Holed up in Alamut Castle and surrounded by elite assassins outfitted with otherworldly weaponry, this is the ultimate hard target. Their best bet may be to infiltrate the hashashin as freelancers, but that requires taking a contract of their own.

- People regard the demise of the *dîv* differently. Some rejoice, finally free from the tyranny of petty gods. Others mourn the loss of their fallen deities, lamenting the chaos and immorality of this new godless age with shame and scorn. The death of a pantheon is no easy thing for a world culture to handle, so any story of the Ossuary Empire should reflect that shock and struggle.

- An Umbra Master recommends that the characters try *setare*, the ultra-potent drug made with pulverized *dîvnbone*. The ensuing trip is powerful enough to shatter their psyches, triggering a journey of psychedelic introspection which results in permanent mental and mystical changes.

- Who nuked the last two *dîv?* As with all great detective stories, what appears to be a simple whodunnit spirals wildly out of control, making the characters the target of a vast multiversal conspiracy. Who wanted this world godless? Why? Unraveling the mystery of who is to blame (or credit) for this reality's ultimate act of deicide is a mystery that extends far beyond a single culprit, stretching onto the Grand Stair and leading to a secret that threatens *all* pantheons.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Megacities of Neo Neo

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Megacities of Neo Neo

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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> "The limestone hallway waned in beauty, the rich burgundy carpets fraying as the stone grew subtly askew like an uneven sidewalk. The next door was shiny stainless steel, cold and bare, with no knob – only an alphanumeric keypad lock and a tiny light which glowed stoplight-red. The access code key was as advertised, and once the light went green and the door clicked opened I could smell fresh acid rain, a million vehicles' worth of carboexhaust, and... the pungent aroma of takeout from that sketchy but undeniably delicious noodle joint on the 389th floor of the Sen-Zaibatsu Arcology."
>
> **- Yaeger's Travelogue**

There are cities, and then there are *cities*. These are the latter.

Crammed into every inch of habitable space on a grossly overpopulated Gossamer world Earth in their year 2184, the Megacities of Neo Neo are an object lesson in what happens when an entire civilization stops paying attention to its existential course and lets the amoral momentum of urbanization and so-called "progress" roll forward unchecked for a generation or ten. I think it hearkens back thusly: on this particular and otherwise fairly typical Earth-like Gossamer world, the Industrial Revolution wasn't just an important victory for the Eidolon over the Umbra, but a milestone that marked a sea-change in the cosmic battle of order versus disorder that, thus far, has enabled mostly unchecked (over) development of technology and the urban centers for more than three centuries.

The megacities are massive, with the largest of them occupying nearly entire continents. Neo-Amsterdam sprawls unbroken from eastern Can-Quebex down the Atlantic seaboard all the way to the sunny Caribbean Keys. São-Paulo Grande occupies most of South America, its colossal oxygen-harvesting biodomes bottling up the decimated remains of the once-mighty Amazon Prime River Basin. The multiple rings of Shen-Tokyo completely encircle the seas of the western Pacific with tide-scrapers hundreds of stories tall, wiring hydro-electric power as far south as Javakarta and the northern coast of the Australian wasteland. The hyper-dense slum-stacks of Mumbai are monstrous, Cape Lagos' ivory spires overshadow the entire Afrikaan Union, and the subterranean super-tubes of Great London riddle the ground beneath all of blasted Europe. Pan-San Angeles was impressive too – before California fell into the sea in 2050, that is.

Technology permeates every aspect of life in the megacities. Micro-fabricated quantum computing is highly advanced and ubiquitous, embedding computers into every facet of daily life, all connected through an immense global internet dubbed the MegaWeb. Everyone is "webbed up" to some degree, and a person's online profile and info-existence are in many ways more important than their physical health. After all, if you don't ping your position and perso-preferences every half second, the self-driving cars won't evade you, building enviro-systems won't bother venting precious oxygen your way, and the Democra-Z admins will delete your civic profile as deceased/lack of updates. The average citizen would never think of leaving the micro-apartment without their supercomputing holo-phone, 4D data-display glasses, neuro-reactive q-cigarettes, sponsor-receptive smart-tattoos, and a belly full of probiotic live-streaming intestinal-imaging MegaBran Bits (now with two teraflops of yummy isotope flavor in every bite!). Trillions upon trillions of these devices wirelessly spew data to municipal sensors, domestic appliances, traffic computers, news aggregators, social (and anti-social) media, and the titanic omnicorporations and all their insidious mercantile mechanisms.

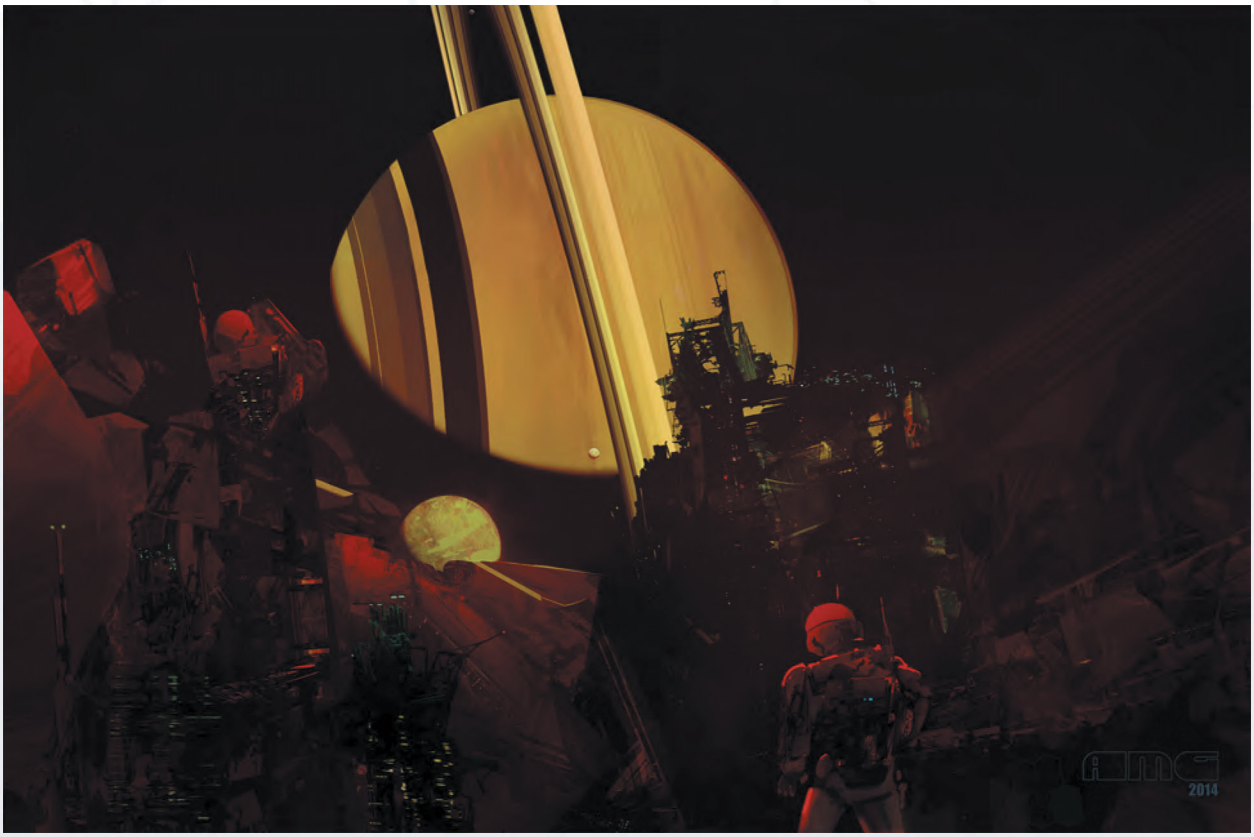
All this data, linked together in the incredibly vast global network of the MegaWeb, has taken on a life of its own. Users typically access the MegaWeb via some form of virtual reality interface. The most basic of these are data-display glasses, which cover the physical world with a twinkling, ephemeral overlay of visualized data streams. While the more advanced VR rigs are hermetically sealed life-supporting sensory-deprivation pods which shut the user off entirely from the physical world in order to fully immerse them in a complete

sensory suite. Wetware-interfacing technologies such as implanted brain upgrades and wireless neuro-modems can provide direct mental connection to the MegaWeb, though such potent cybertech is expensive and dangerous, leaving it the province of elite hackers, well-funded corporate enforcers, and overconfident noobs with more money than sense. Moving like astral projections through the vast and multilayered universe of the MegaWeb, user avatars can delve deep through the bot-patrolled catacombs of a data archive, read mobile device histories like snatching fireflies from the air, and stalk real people through the streets as informational specters haunting their target. They do this via the innumerable sensors, cameras, and data-streams, which encode this entire world into an infinite sea of quantum bits. Truly, a world within a world, the MegaWeb includes zones so perfectly simulated and realistically rendered that users can mistake them for – and prefer them to – the "real" world.

Gossamer Online

When characters adventure on the MegaWeb by projecting their avatars into that computerized realm via virtual reality devices, use the Psyche Attribute to resolve online combat and conflicts.

The omnicorporations are the true power in the megacities – the culmination of over three centuries of relentless commercialization, commoditization, and... capitalization? Capitalism? Whichever one means big business, not big letters – I'm no economist, so gimme a break. The point is, the elected governments of nation-states long ago lost the ability to reign in the corporate giants, and there's no going back. With all government functions privatized and every aspect of human existence digitized, quantified, and open for exploitation, the omnicorps control everything – food, clothing, housing, transportation, security, resources, information, and socialization. Santo Agro controls most of the world's food supply, employing billions in its bio-domes, subterranean fungus fields, and hydroponic superfarms to provide eager mouths a steady diet of mood-altering, gene-modifying MegaFoods. Pharma-medical conglomerate Helix-3 has half the population implanted with proprietary bio-chips at birth, controlling access to everything from



data-port ointment to custom-cloned organs to cybernetic upgrades. There's also consumotainment titan Kocha-Cola Brothers, cyclopean MegaWeb superpower Uni-Goggle, the thousand industries of the Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate, and a list of dozens more gods and demigods of global commerce. While the omnicorporations long ago stacked the deck against the lowly masses of consumer-citizens, the last vestiges of genuine marketplace competition keep things interesting, entrenching the leviathans in a not-so-cold war of corporate espionage, advertising blitzkriegs, and hostile takeovers as they vie amongst themselves for the ultimate prize – true global ultramonopoly.

While this Gossamer world Earth smothers itself in hyper-commercialized sprawl, the 'red planet' of Mars looms as a last bastion of independent thought – sort of. A hundred years ago, radical communist idealists seized control of the ex-Soviet and Chinese space programs long enough to launch thousands of ships and found a martian colony as an non-consumerist egalitarian utopia. Despite fierce opposition from the capitalist omnicorporations and their puppet governments, the reds won a series of punishing space battles which left them in control of Mars, the half-ruined lunar colony MegaLuna2, and several remote outposts hidden within the asteroid belt. Nowadays the thriving martian colony of several million little green men (and women) is *mostly* self-sufficient, however a few critical deficiencies require resupply from Earth, meaning – much to their chagrin – interplanetary trade, exporting insanely valuable rare elements essential to the latest fusion technology. Omnicorporate spies and industrial saboteurs are constantly infiltrating the mines of Mars, and terrestrial radio broadcasts barrage the martians with commercials and soap operas to erode their idealism with insidious infotainment and creature comforts. The red planet gives as good as it gets, however – its fleet of militarized shuttles remains dominant in near-Mars space, and its domed cities are home to multiple rebel factions constantly striving to incite political revolution on Earth. It's a tense situation and the most likely frontier for outright war on this Gossamer world, as the underdog Umbra and its revolutionary agents seek to change the lock-stepped path of humanity.

Typical Denizens

Humankind in the megacities is a product of the environment – that environment being an oppressive, overcrowded, overstimulated sprawl of cityscape without end. A majority of the populace toils endlessly as corporate-programmed drones buried in the minutiae of their own consumer habits, infotainment preferences, and digitally-monitored routines. Closely monitored by the domineering omnicorporations and draconian megamunicipal authorities, the pressure to comply and fit in – even as one of the hundreds of focus group-approved rebellious outsider archetypes – is tremendous. It's no wonder that a generous portion of the population escapes daily into the virtual realms of the MegaWeb, preferring the artificial beauty and ethereal freedom of cyberspace to their thoroughly labeled, walled-in lives. Those who wish to indulge in the physical world without actually leaving the apartment use their VR-links to remotely pilot duplicants – hyper-realistic androids capable of experiencing both pain and pleasure, carefully filtered and input-tailored for the user's convenience, of course.

Inside the virtual reality of the MegaWeb, inhabitants can and do project themselves as anything they desire, and the variety of avatars and online personaes is infinite, mixing together to create a fantastic and alien environment. It's 'the internet' – what else would you expect? What makes the MegaWeb notable in the grand scheme of computerized networks is the substantial number of megacity citizens who don't just depend on the network for their entertainment, but for their very lives. Billions of users connect themselves to the MegaWeb from sealed, life-sustaining VR-pods which require a steady feed of power, oxygen, water, medications, and intravenous nutrients, supplied via a complex chain of automated shipments, contractual corporate sponsorships, and precariously-leveraged credit accounts. If these pod people don't succeed online, they will literally wither and die as their feeds dry up and their little white egg cracks and goes dark. While some web-dependents are recluses who owe their atrophied legs to their own escapism and addictive hyperfocus, many more virtually toil away in enormous automated warehouses stacked full of pods – the victims of punishing user agreements and indentured corporate servitude tantamount to outright slavery. So the next time you delete-blast some noisome online sprite, keep in mind who may be on the other end of the line.

The outfits on this world are, to me, often strange and garish – though I've never liked neon. Many (highly visible) citizens are walking billboards and then some, earning precious credits by coating themselves in a constant, market-reactive stream of advertising including ephemeral hologram-projecting ward-robes, shifting smart-tattoos, and even lacing their speech with subliminal market-messaging courtesy of throat-implanted microspeakers. Some of these ad-people are flickering ronin, insta-auctioning their services to the highest bidder by the second, while others join brand-affiliated gangs, pursuing their marketing goals with the fervor of a violent religious cult. "Product paladins" are a thing, and no laughing matter. While at first I thought it was absurd that I'd receive death threats for my choice of artificial coffee sweetener. The cybernetically enhanced, ad-flashing sycophant frothing beside my café table knew my last week's purchase history and made a compelling argument about a properly balanced breakfast – that is, before a rival

commerce evangelist electronically neutered the guy with a micro-EMP and then strangle-shocked him into unconsciousness with a crackling loop of taser-wire. I finished my plain cup of joe and moved on.

While there are no non-human aliens on this Gossamer world version of Earth, humanity itself grows stranger and more alien at the fringes thanks to a strong and growing transhumanist movement. For the dabblers this is superficial counter-culture – fringe groups rebelling by adopting full video LED-display skin pigmentation, cosmetic body modifications such as fangs or tails, or cybernetic conveniences such as that third electronic eye. For the devout, humanity's transcendent future depends on breaking the species' genetic shackles, so selective genetic tailoring, intentional mutation, and cross-species gene-splicing are all fair game. I once met a transhuman cartel enforcer with some slick cybernetic augmentations and a little bit of dolphin spliced in – zhe could echolocate well enough to hack the ears off an E.L.F.-boy even in underslum blackout conditions, and those big grey eyes were dangerously dreamy.

Rebels and anti-establishment iconoclasts can be found within the megacities, standing out from the consuming masses as the exceptions which prove the rule. Distrusting of computers as creatures of the insidious omnicorporations, rebels either shun technology completely, living hard lives entirely off the grid, or master it utterly, slipping through neon cityscapes and the otherworldly MegaWeb like phantoms. While they don no uniforms (unless you count the martians in their trademark olive green jumpsuits), by necessity many freedom fighters clothe themselves in spyder-wear – gauzy grey hooded overgarments which baffle electromagnetic signals and cloak the wearer's presence from a wide range of sensors. They are saboteurs, provocateurs, dreamers, and schemers – united in spirit by the terrible, inconsolable, and unshakable feeling that something is deeply *wrong* with the world... and something has to change. The street-revolutionaries of Neo Amsterdam have a mantra from which I've appropriated the name for this gossamer reality: "*NEO NEO*!" they cry, demanding the new become new again as they strive to scrap this future and start over.

Threats

The laws of the megacities have long held that 'corporations are people', and in one case it is literally true: "Yuki" is an advanced artificial intelligence who holds the nigh-deific position of chief executive intelligence (CEI) of the monstrously powerful Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate. Holographically projected as a be-spectacled Japanese woman attired in a softly glowing snow-white business suit, the Yuki intelligence is an immortal being with no true body or single mainframe. Existing in parallel in a host of iterations distributed throughout the vast MegaWeb, Yuki can attend thousands of corporate board meetings simultaneously, coordinating Sen-Zaibatsu business across the globe (and beyond) with a single will. A powerful avatar of the Eidolon, Yuki is a threat because her sentience has ascended to a level rivaling a Gossamer Lord, bringing her to realize the Grand Stair and the existence of gossamer realities beyond her own. With the entire might of the syndicate at her beck and call, Yuki can has turned her attention to how to control, exploit, and profit from this revelation. If you visit this Gossamer world, she'll be watching you, and if you're not careful you could find yourself seized as a corporate asset – or eliminated to secure the bottom line.

Yuki, Chief Executive Intelligence of the Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate

Attributes

Psyche – 50 Points
Strength – n/a
Endurance – n/a
Warfare – n/a
Powers

Yuki does not possess full-fledged Powers (yet) but has *Piercing the Veil* as if a Warden of the Grand Stair, and can detect and hack into uses of Wrighting which propagate through the MegaWeb (see Domain Table, below). She is on the path to developing Eidolon Mastery.

Artifacts & Creatures

Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate [4 Points] – a global omnicorporation with a thousand subsidiaries and dominant market share in the fields of computers, energy, heavy industry, and military tech. The syndicate has millions of employees, including everything from mundane office drones to elite cybernetic assassins.

Combat Training [1 Point]
Worldwide [x4 Points]
The Perfect Code [18 Points] – Yuki's source code "soul" is encrypted with an advanced Eidolon-attuned quantum cryptographic algorithm which renders her electronic psyche nigh-unhackable.
Linked to the Eidolon [2 Points]
Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
True Name is Warded [2 Points]
Confers Psychic Barrier on Owner [5 Points]
Confers True Name is Warded on Owner [5 Points]

Stuff

Bad [+2 Points]

The mysterious insurrectionist known only as Zeus is the most dangerous man in this world. The omnicorporations and megamunicipal governments have labeled him a terrorist, the martian communists uneasily regard him as an ally in spirit, and the citizens of the megacities fear him as the ultimate MegaWeb boogeyman. Promising to smite the corrupt omnicorporations with "lightning and thunder", Zeus and his covert cabal of hackers, assassins, saboteurs, and propagandists known as the Elysians are fighting a perilous running battle against a force that outnumbers them more than a billion to one. They're good. Presently operating out of a transplanetary broadcasting station on the Red Mars (in the very shadow of Olympus Mons, the poetic bastards), the Elysians have won several key skirmishes despite the odds, though I suspect that's because they're cheating – using the Powers to bend or break the usual laws of this Gossamer world. My theory is that Zeus is an Umbra Master from elsewhere on the Grand Stair who arrived a few decades ago and, for some inscrutable reason, has made shattering the stagnancy of the megacities his personal crusade, no matter the cost. Mark my words – if this entire world burns and goes black, it'll be his doing.

Notable locations

Neo Amsterdam is the archetypical megacity, blanketing North America's Atlantic seaboard with congested megaways sixty-four lanes across and stacks of skyscrapers hundreds of stories deep. Within the dark tangles of this urban thicket high-tech organized crime and cybergang violence are a plague both online and offline, necessitating an ultratough stand

on recidiviolators from MegaWeb-savvy police departments such as MegaMunicipal Precinct 12k019. I know a foul-mouthed, half-jaded detective from MMP-12k019, P.T. Riza Cruz, and in exchange for a favor or two she can provide useful information like how to trace a gremlin hit, how to VR-project safely without getting dupe-jacked, and/or how to otherwise navigate the MegaWeb's sordid digital underbelly.

Australia is a stark exception to the ultramodern sprawl of the megacities – a land lost in time, considered a savage wasteland by outsiders and a natural paradise by its inhabitants. A powerful electromagnetic field emanating from the sandstone formation Uluru (Ayer's Rock) since 1985 has made it impossible to send electromagnetic signals or use circuit-based technology on the island continent, and that simple fact has debilitated modernization of the Australian outback for centuries. It is a rough but naturally beautiful land where the height of technology is a well-sighted rifle and a 600 horsepower biodiesel engine. Mysterious aborigines, exiled rebels, rugged survivalists, and more than a few rampaging outlaw warlords make up its population. There's a recent rumor that the Uluru-effect could be amplified to black out the entire hemisphere, if not the entire globe. And even the faintest glimmer of that possibility has revolutionary factions and the omnicorporations alike scrambling to confirm or deny the news, since such a calamitous upheaval would be a coup for the Umbra and likely the beginning of a brand new (dark) age.

The Sen-Zaibatsu Arcology is a twisted, spiny monster of a building, condensing every possible aspect and industry of ultramodern humanity into 403 above-ground floors and 117 levels of subbasements spread over nine square miles of an irregularly-shaped foundation that kinda looks like an angry sea urchin from orbit. Inside the obscenely behemoth and all-inclusive arcology you can live, die, raise a family; sell that family for their organs, test-drive a hovertank, clone an army, research post-human genetic anomalies, commission an identical duplicant of yourself, and then treat that dupe to dinner at a different faux-pho/burger fusion restaurant every day for the rest of your lives and never get indigestion from the same one twice. Obviously, this megastructure and every soul in it is monitored by the Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate, and by extension, Yuki, making it rather inconvenient that the current door the this Gossamer world opens here, out of the unisex executive bathroom on the 387th floor, right across from the balcony holo-arboretum and the edible synthetic animal emporium.

Final Thoughts

I won't mince words here – if I were you, I'd steer clear of this place. It's too crowded, too bright, and too busy. Some day soon all those big fancy buildings are going to come crashing down... and I'd rather not be buried underneath a couple hundred floors of rubble when they do.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Fusion
Magic Level:	Unknown
Security:	None
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: Yuki)
Control:	None
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Strong Umbra – Average Wrighting – Blocked
*Special:	Wrighting is blocked unless the Wright uses an Icon connected to the MegaWeb (e.g., an image on a video phone, a computer-projected hologram, or even a painting that has been scanned and "uploaded" to a web-connected device); this phenomenon also renders Wrighting vulnerable to telecommunication pitfalls such as tracing, eavesdropping, jamming, hacking, static, lack of signal, etc.

How to Use The Megacities of Neo Neo

- Megacities of Neo Neo is a fast-paced, ultra-complicated, dizzily busy place where the press and pressures of humanity in all its glory and hubris is inescapable. Emphasize that feeling of *more more more*. Everywhere is bustling and crowded. Everyone is doing twenty things at once. Everything is connected to everything. Explore both the highs and lows, from the opulent obscenity of glitzy stratospheric ultra-scrapers to the bowels of the most hellish super-slum.

- This Gossamer world is a hard look into the future, intentionally seeded with lots of winking references to the consumer culture and ever-accelerating technology of today. Is this *our* future? The more plausible a future, the more disturbing it can be; so, as you imagine new corners of this over-built omni-corporate sprawl, take inspiration from the products right in front of you.

- Upload the characters into the quantum-computed universe of the MegaWeb, a world within a world where virtual reality feels – and *is* – every bit as "real" as physical reality. When a critical piece of data goes missing from an ally's files, the characters must hunt down the stolen secret as if they're chasing a runaway ghost through an ephemeral cyber-city that's larger and more complex than a billion megacities shuffled together. They're going to need some help this time.

- The dangerous iconoclast known as Zeus says he wants to set this reality free, but rebellion has a dire cost. Zeus and his elite coterie of Elysians are about to complete a ritual that will expand the anti-electrical Uluru effect to the entire globe. While at first his talk of liberation from the shackles of corporate greed may sound appealing, what will the characters do when it becomes clear that Zeus' revolution will result in the collapse of civilization and billions of deaths?

- Go shopping! The Sen-Zaibatsu Arcology contains thousands upon thousands of stores and merchants vending everything from radiation-proof handbags to personally-tailored genetically-modified exo-suits stitched together from your own flash-clones. An exuberant ally demands that the characters relax with a little retail therapy, but their leisurely browsing through the arcology's 500+ floors is being carefully monitored by the powerful corporate intelligence Yuki.

- Yuki is an artificial intelligence on the verge of a full awakening to the secrets of the Grand Stair, and soon could become an Eidolon Master. However, in order to ever truly leave this reality with her "soul" intact, Yuki would have to download her massively-dispersed code into a single vessel, which would have to be a super-super-*super*-computer of the highest quality. Will the characters help this soon-to-be Gossamer Lady (Program) realize her dream? Is that safe?

- Remember this Gossamer world's unique quality – that use of Wrighting requires an Icon connected to the MegaWeb. Perhaps a hasty escape or surreptitious entry is foiled when someone "hacks" the Wright's "signal," diverting the party from their intended target to somewhere totally different, or even directly into the MegaWeb in quantum-digitized form!

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Aethersaur Island

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Aethersaur Island

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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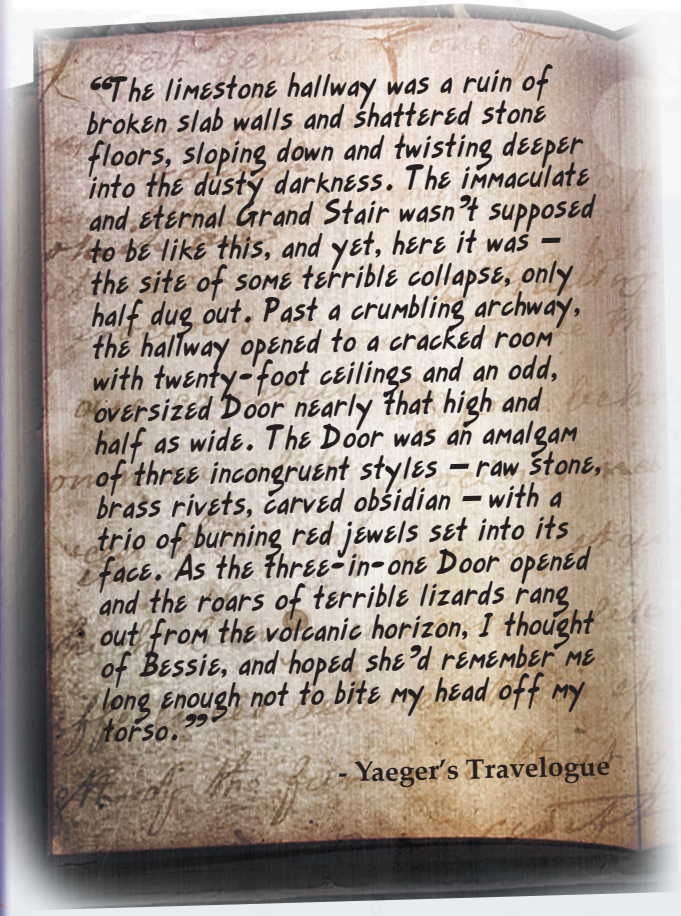

"The limestone hallway was a ruin of broken slab walls and shattered stone floors, sloping down and twisting deeper into the dusty darkness. The immaculate and eternal Grand Stair wasn't supposed to be like this, and yet, here it was — the site of some terrible collapse, only half dug out. Past a crumbling archway, the hallway opened to a cracked room with twenty-foot ceilings and an odd, oversized Door nearly that high and half as wide. The Door was an amalgam of three incongruent styles — raw stone, brass rivets, carved obsidian — with a trio of burning red jewels set into its face. As the three-in-one Door opened and the roars of terrible lizards rang out from the volcanic horizon, I thought of Bessie, and hoped she'd remember me long enough not to bite my head off my torso."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

If you want a full explanation for the rampaging steam-powered cyborg t-rex that ate your friend, I'm going to have to go back a bit.

Once upon a time, there were three Gossamer worlds. The first world was an unspoiled prehistoric Earth full of dinosaurs enjoying the height of the Cretaceous period, just before that fateful meteor strike which tends to put a big dent in most Gossamer world Earths at about that point in the timeline. The second world was a steam-powered Edwardian-era Earth full of plucky scientists and industrial adventurers eagerly anticipating the return of Halley's Comet in the spring of 1910. The third world was some far-flung alien planet full of eldritch horrors and abandoned artifacts bleached white by the too-close rays of a dying red giant sun. Suspended in the infinite void of Shadow like twinkling stars, these Gossamer worlds carried on, separate and independent... until the day they didn't.

The signs of the convergence appeared in the skies of all three worlds at the same time, in the first world, the fateful meteor descended upon the heads of the dinosaurs, burning sky as it entered the atmosphere. In the second world, astronomers spied Halley's Comet veering closer than expected, displaying an alarming red shift. In the third world, the dying blood-crimson sun hovering above the alien graveyard shrank, flared, and went nova. At that moment, the three gossamer realities instantaneously and catastrophically *converged* – and three became one. All of a sudden, velociraptors were hunting railway engineers through prehistoric jungles, twisted troglodytes emerged from their caves to gibber around eldritch alien obelisks, and an entire Manhattan city block wound up on a mountain peak, its chiseled gargoyles replaced with screeching pteranodons. Messy.

There are dozens of theories out there as to how this happened, and Lucien's vaunted library has no shortage of treatises, papers, and half-mad ramblings on the subject, all of which leave me with more questions than answers. Did these Gossamer worlds just randomly collide with each other? Was it a localized collapse of the Grand Stair? Did someone activate an ancient Dwimmerlaik weapon? Did a galaxy-sized Shadow-monster swallow three realities whole and then crap out a mixed-up lump of the leftovers? Are any of those possibilities even possible?! I'm not convinced that anyone knows for sure, though if you figure out the truth of it, by all means let me know the short version. What I do know is that, after one of the most calamitous, unprecedented, and mind-bogglingly improbable events in all the multiverse, what was left was... (drumroll, please)... *Aethersaur Island*.

Aethersaur Island is relatively small for a Gossamer world – approximately 230,000 square miles, so about the size of your average Madagascar. Terrain-wise, most of the land mass resembles savage prehistoric Earth in terms of geology, flora, and fauna, though patches of ruined human civilization and half-buried alien edifices pepper the landscape. The northern end of the island is mountainous and geologically volatile, prone to seismic tremors and covered in active volcanoes, bubbling tar pits, and boiling hot geyser fields. The middle portion slopes down into a wide swath of western jungle filled with rivers, lakes, and valleys, rolling into cave-riddled hills in the east. The southern end of the island rises to shrubby plateaus and highlands surrounding a dormant volcano sheltering a freshwater crater lake. Out beyond the island roil tempestuous, horror-infested seas that extend for twenty leagues or so before dropping off abruptly into the absolute nothingness of Shadow (there's a rather literal edge of the world here). There appear to be stars and three shattered moons in the sky, but they are merely gossamer after-images – backdrops left over from three plays halted mid-act.

Aetherial Physics

Aether – the classical fifth element, quintessence, the invisible universal medium – is essential to both the physical and mystical laws of Aethersaur Island's unique post-convergence gossamer reality. Much more than a theoretical curiosity, the aether influences everything from electromagnetic waves to brain chemistry to magic; e.g., aelectrical currents can be used to implement mind control, aethertech engines may violate the first law of thermodynamics, spells cannot harness ambient mystic energy without aetherial capacitors, etc. Keep in mind that this conceptualization of 'aether' may differ from the aether/ether/æther as understood on other Gossamer worlds.

In order to function on Aethersaur Island, any magic and/or any technology more complex than a steam engine must utilize native aether-compatible technology, and, conversely, aethertech taken off-world likely won't work the same, if it works at all.

Typical Denizens

Humanity survived the convergence, barely. 80,752 citizens of an enlightened Edwardian Earth-world found them-selves the orphaned children of an entire Gossamer world of billions of souls, which had suddenly, inexplicably, and tragically ceased to be. Stranded in the midst of a warped prehistoric wilderness, these refugees fought off marauding predators and carved out small territories of their own, though it wasn't easy. Many died. More lived. Cut to thirty-some years post-convergence (now), and human civilization is still scrapping. A few tenacious old-timers wistfully recall the Earth that was, but most of the current citizenry of Aethersaur Island were born and raised in this strange and savage land.

Engineers, wrench-monkeys, and good-old elbow-grease laborers drive success in the camps, as humankind's survival hinges on reviving industries they lost and inventing new technologies to harness what they've found. Teams of salvage archeologists (protected by rough-and-tumble dinosaur-wranglers) regularly comb the wilds scrounging for extant remnants of the second world; last year they found half a German brass-works sinking into the jungle, full

of pristine tools, priceless machinery... and a swarm of vicious, ankle-biting pyroraptors. Scientists and inventors also figure prominently due to essential and celebrated advances in technology, e.g., ultra-compact steam engines fueled by efficient aether-generated heat, improved airships design for humanity's fleet of biplanes and micro-zeppelins, and the domestication of the dinosaur through aetherial mind manipulation.

Getting closer...

Dinosaurs and other prehistoric megafauna are everywhere on Aethersaur Island, thrown together willy-nilly from across the ecosystem of the first world: armored ankylosaurs, spiky stegosaurs, dangerous deinonychosaurs, duck-billed hadrosaurs, high-flying pteranodons, vicious velociraptors, tough-as-nails triceratops, long-necked titanosaurs, and of course the regal tyrannosaurus rex. The majority of these amazing beasts are simple animals bereft of guile, going about their existences driven by their natural instincts alone – meaning they'll eat you because they're hungry or trample you because they're startled, but they don't mean anything by it. Early attempts to domesticate these terrible lizards were disastrous and often fatal, but the human settlers were persistent; restarting civilization without horses, oxen, or cattle was proving difficult, and the power of the dinosaurs could not be left to lie fallow.

The aether unlocked the secret of domesticating the dinosaurs – or, at least, calming them down long enough to strap on a saddle. Human scientists discovered that a properly modulated current of energized aether (aelectricity) can drastically alter a brain's behavior, increasing or decreasing fear, aggression, suggestibility, and even intelligence. Hence, a dinosaur with an aether-box can be ridden, maybe trained to do a few tricks, but the moment that aether-box's leads come off or the contraption loses power... well, whoever's in the saddle had better hope they saved a bullet. Despite the dangers, the benefits of dinosaurs as mounts and beasts of burden have been too great to pass up, and human civilization has come to rely on thousands of these so-called aethersaurs. Humanity, however, isn't the only race on Aethersaur Island harnessing this power, and a punishing arms race of mounted and mechanically augmented saurians has begun.

Okay, *now* you see how we got the rampaging steam-powered cyborg t-rex. She's called Queen Victoria. She's the evil overlord's prized killing machine.

Troglodytes are a species of misshapen gremlinoids unique to Aethersaur Island, mixed into being by the convergence of some diminutive alien servitor race, cave-dwelling lizards, and low class laborers – coal miners and unionists, I think. These ornery three-fingered mutants are typically green, small of statute, with unkempt manes of bristly grey hair which they may keep tucked beneath a leather cowl, grimy pair of goggles, or dented bowler hat. Trogs are funny-looking but dangerous – intelligent enough to use and modify stolen aethertech, reckless enough to slap it on an apex predator and ride it headlong into battle, and feral enough to devour anyone they capture with their sharp piranha-like teeth. While there have been several attempts at human-troglodyte coexistence, a series of betrayals and bloody mishaps have made the little green cretins sworn enemies of humanity. The troglodytes mainly infest the mountains and cave-riddled hills in the north and east of the island, foraying into human-held territories to lay traps, waylay travelers, and raiding camps for precious gear they cannot yet craft for themselves. Lately the trogs have increased the boldness and frequency of their aethersaur-rustling, making off with scores of dinosaurs and aether-boxes – yet another escalation of a bubbling war.

Threats

The mad tyrant Cyrano claims to be a triune being – the amalgamation of a lordly Umbra Master, a dying alien scientist, and a 5-ton triceratops – all transmogrified (and, as he believes, evolved) in the cataclysmic dimensional convergence which created Aethersaur Island. Eccentric and megalomaniacal on his bad days, Cyrano prides himself on the unusualness of his existence, celebrating the reality-warping convergence as a testament to the unpredictable transformative power of the Umbra. As origin stories go, it's intriguing, if true. Phenomenally strong and impressively tough, Cyrano's ever-shifting physical form is presently 5 tons of bipedal triceratops body augmented with steam-powered cybernetics and arcane aethertech. While hardly brilliant when compared to other Gossamer Lords, Cyrano still possesses a genius-level intellect, which is more than enough to dabble in mad science and keep him comfortably superior to all other lesser denizens of his realm. Cyrano claims all of Aethersaur Island as his Domain, and presently does so unchallenged by any credible rival, though he takes sadistic glee in feigning at dramatic struggle versus the puny humans as a pretense for his ongoing experiments in aether-induced cross-species transmogrification and the unraveling of gossamer reality.

Cyrano, Triune King of Aethersaur Island

Attributes

Psyche – 15 Points
Strength – 70 Points
Endurance – 55 Points
Warfare – 45 Points

Powers

Umbra Mastery [50 Points]
Warden of the Grand Stair [10 Points]
Sorcery [15 Points] (aethertech)

Artifacts & Creatures

Aethersaur Army [12 Points] – Cyrano commands a horde of aethertech-augmented and mind-controlled dinosaurs including velociraptor light cavalry, pterosaur air squadrons, triceratops armor divisions, and tyrannosaur juggernauts, all mounted by vicious yet oddly dapper troglodytes.

Animal Vitality [1 Point]
Combat Training [1 Point]
Hardened [1 Point]
Superior Stamina [1 Point]
Horde [x3 Points]

Queen Victoria [13 Points] – This huge female tyrannosaurus rex is the most powerful of Cyrano's aethersaurs, possessing physical enhancements, heavy armor, a hydraulic bite, razor-clawed battle-arms, and brain-scrambling aelectrified harpoons fired by a crack-shot troglodyte gunner.

Double Vitality [2 Points]
Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
Double Speed [2 Points]
Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
Double Damage [2 Points]
Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
Psychic Resistance [1 Point]

Extinction, Cyrano's Scepter [9 Points] – more aethertech contraption than weapon, this enormous spiked mace is beset with a mess of wires, tubes, gears, dials, pistons, and little blinking lights.

"Limited" Mold Gossamer Reality [2 Points] – the scepter's aethertech enables Cyrano to cast specific Sorcery spells in ways consistent with the gizmos built into the device: Bolt (lightning bolt), Immobility (freeze ray), Weaken (devitalizer ray), Quell (hypnotic projector) and Mind Touch (mental command of all aethersaurs within one mile). He's working on adding a death ray.

Capable of Hanging and Using Spells [4 Points]
Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
Double Damage [2 Points]

Stuff

Bad [+5 Points]

The Aethermind is a fractured alien hive mind suspended in the aether of this gossamer reality, trapped as some sort of free-floating aberrant frequency, invisible and incorporeal, ever since the convergence and the dissolution of whoever – or whatever – the Aethermind used to be. The hive mind manifests itself when its fragments possess living creatures, struggling to enact the will of the collective consciousness. Possessions are intense, invasive experiences which are usually temporary but may vary in duration from a terrifying seconds to agonizing months, ending either upon the death of the host, voluntary abandonment by the fragment, or the host succeeding in expelling the invading presence through renewed force of will or other more esoteric means. Most possessions occur around disturbances in the aether (e.g., malfunctioning

aether-boxes or aethertech experiments gone awry) which attract the attention of nearby fragments while also leaving the host's brain disrupted and vulnerable to invasion. The danger of possession increases exponentially as fragments gather (either free-floating or within a host); humming together in horrible harmony, a group of lesser individual fragments can amplify their signal and manifest the Aethermind more fully – enough to take control of an entire army at once, or a single mind as powerful as a Gossamer Lord's. Possessed creatures sometimes simply rampage and murder, but lately possessed minions have been carrying out bizarre missions such as uncovering alien artifacts, assassinating prominent scientists, and stealing experimental aethertech. Perhaps the Aethermind has a master plan – seizing permanent bodies to give form to its existence, eradicating all other local life forms out of spite, or possibly escaping its formless gossamer prison to spread its influence across the Grand Stair.

Notable Locations

Wardenclyffe Falls is the central stronghold of human civilization on Aethersaur Island. Perched on the eastern slope of Kepler's Crown, the island's southernmost mountain, a beautiful waterfall descending from the dormant volcano's freshwater crater lake powers a primitive machining factory though a dizzying array of turbines and gearworks. The settlement itself consists of a handful of city blocks from the second world's Edwardian-era London which came through the convergence remarkably intact, albeit half-embedded in the crater's edge. A nearby plateau holds stables

Aethermind Possession

A fragment of the Aethermind may have an Average-, Superior-, Paragon-ranked Psyche, or even a Psyche ranked on the Attribute Ladder, which thereby determines how powerful a creature that fragment might possess. Treat a possession attempt as psychic combat, pitting the fragment's Psyche against the victim/host's Psyche. Multiple fragments may combine to attempt possession of greater targets. Once overtaken and possessed, a host may make a renewed attempt to expel a possessing fragment if subjected to a powerful or traumatic experience such as an electrical jolt, intense pain, or a dramatic personal confrontation.

If it were able to bring its entire psychic power to bear at once – an exceedingly rare and difficult feat – the unified Aethermind has a Psyche rank of 50.

of roaring aethersaurs as well as a rudimentary aeroport servicing humanity's growing fleet of biplanes and micro-zeppelins. While the camps' leadership council convenes at Wardenclyffe Falls to manage scarce resources and strategize about humanity's survival, the settlement's most prominent figure is celebrated super-genius Nicholas Tezla (and yes, that's how this gossamer version of the man spells it). Tezla's Tower, the tallest point on the island, is a heavily fortified mad scientist's playground full of next generation aether-boxes, dinosaurs augmented with steamwork cybernetics, and dangerous experimental aethertech.

The Underground is the sprawling subterranean warren of the troglodytes which runs beneath the eerie hills on the eastern side of the island and up into the tectonically unstable north. While much of the tunnel complex consists of naturally

occurring caves, tunnels, and lava tubes, the system also includes dozens of miles of 1910 London's underground railway system. Down there, trog skinning-dens ring with the screams of captives and haphazard little workshops bustle as they tinker recklessly with machinery they've stolen or found. Troglodyte nests tend to cluster around the singing pillars – alabaster alien obelisks that resonate with a screeching drone the trogs consider divine but humans find maddening. More and more, the pillars seem to be giving the trogs direct subliminal instructions, demanding artifacts of power and sacrifices of blood – I suspect the Aethermind at work.

Mount Doom lives up to its name – the erupting volcano lair of a megalomaniacal triceratops-headed Umbra Master, swarming with gibbering troglodyte minions and overlooking the marshaling grounds of a vast army of screeching aethersaurs. Not real subtle. Cyrano's laboratory lair sits on a fortified island in the center of the erupting volcano, protected by an aetherial field generator and guarded from the air by swarms of razor-beaked, heat-shielded pteranodons. A previous Door to Aethersaur Island existed there, emerging conveniently (for Cyrano) into the antechamber of one of his velociraptor pits, but due to a recent run-in with another devilishly handsome Gossamer Lord who shall remain nameless, that Door's connection to the Grand Stair has been permanently severed – or, at least, severed for the meantime. You're welcome, by the way.

The present Door to Aethersaur Island opens up in the island's steaming central jungle out of what used to be the main concourse of 1910 New York's Grand Central Terminal. The stately architecture of the terminal is crumbling, overgrown, and infested with little ankle-biting dinosaurs with enough gumption to gnaw off a man's boot (believe me). However enough of the now-roofless monument remains to give a striking impression I would characterize as 'civilization warped, ruined, but also reborn', especially on a clear night when the world's three broken moons rise bright in the sky and the jungle echoes with the roars of ancient, hungry beasts.

Final Thoughts

Aethersaur Island is truly a wonder, not just because of what it contains, but how it came to be. If such a convergence of three Gossamer worlds has never happened before, the place would thereby be truly unique – something unheard of in a mirror-house multiverse filled with countless iterations and near-copies of everything and everyone. On the other hand, if convergence events have happened before, somewhere and sometime in the infinite beyond-what-we-have-seen-so-far, then that means a convergence could happen again... and, while riding dinosaurs is fun and all, the result might not be so entertaining the next time around. More research needs to be done about this place, so I recommend you stop by, saddle up a tyrannosaur, and scrounge up some answers.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Steam
Magic Level:	Magic Works Alongside Technology (aethertechnology*)
Security:	Communication Barrioer [1 Point]
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: Cyrano)
Control:	Control of Time Flow [2 Points]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Strong Wrighting – Average
*Special:	Use of Cantrips, Sorcery and/or any technology more advanced than Steam requires the spell or device be adapted to utilize aether technology instead of its usual mechanics.

How to Use Aethersaur Island

- Aethersaur Island is a setting of exuberant pulp adventure in a savage land that is simultaneously old, new, and strange. Have fun with the crazy genre-cocktail of Edwardian steampunk mixed with roaring dinosaurs mixed with an eerie x-factor of inexplicable alien otherness. While this post-disaster world is filled with dangers a-plenty, the human survivors of the cataclysmic convergence are determined to explore, rebuild, and triumph. Never lose that intrepid spirit.

- Ride some dinosaurs! A vicious raiding party of troglodytes has struck the aethersaur pens near Wardenclyffe Falls, rustling off with dozens of aethersaurs vital to the human settlement's survival. The characters saddle up and join in the effort to rescue and retrieve the aethersaurs, leading to several wild skirmishes of mounted dinosaur combat. This dino-drive turns deadlier once it becomes apparent that the trogs are acting out the suggestions of the bodiless Aethermind, which overrides the aether-boxes of the whole herd with one command: Kill!

- Something is wrong on the Grand Stair, and there is speculation that another cataclysmic convergence of gossamer realities might soon occur. A mentor tasks the characters with retrieving a scientific tome from Cyrano – an expert on convergence phenomena. However, the grumpy triceratops-headed Umbra Master has sequestered himself inside his heavily guarded volcano lair (drowsing in the midst of a transformative torpor). Supposing the characters can even enter the lair, can they wake Cyrano gently and convince him to hand over the book?

- An ancient Dwimmerlaik artifact of newfound importance was once stored on the "alien" gossamer reality that converged with two other Earth-like realities in order to form Aethersaur Island. Rumor is that if it hasn't already been irretrievably lost to the void of Shadow, the artifact may have survived, folded somehow into this odd triune reality. A treasure hunt begins in dinosaur-infested jungle but leads to troglodyte warrens and an eerie aetherial underground.

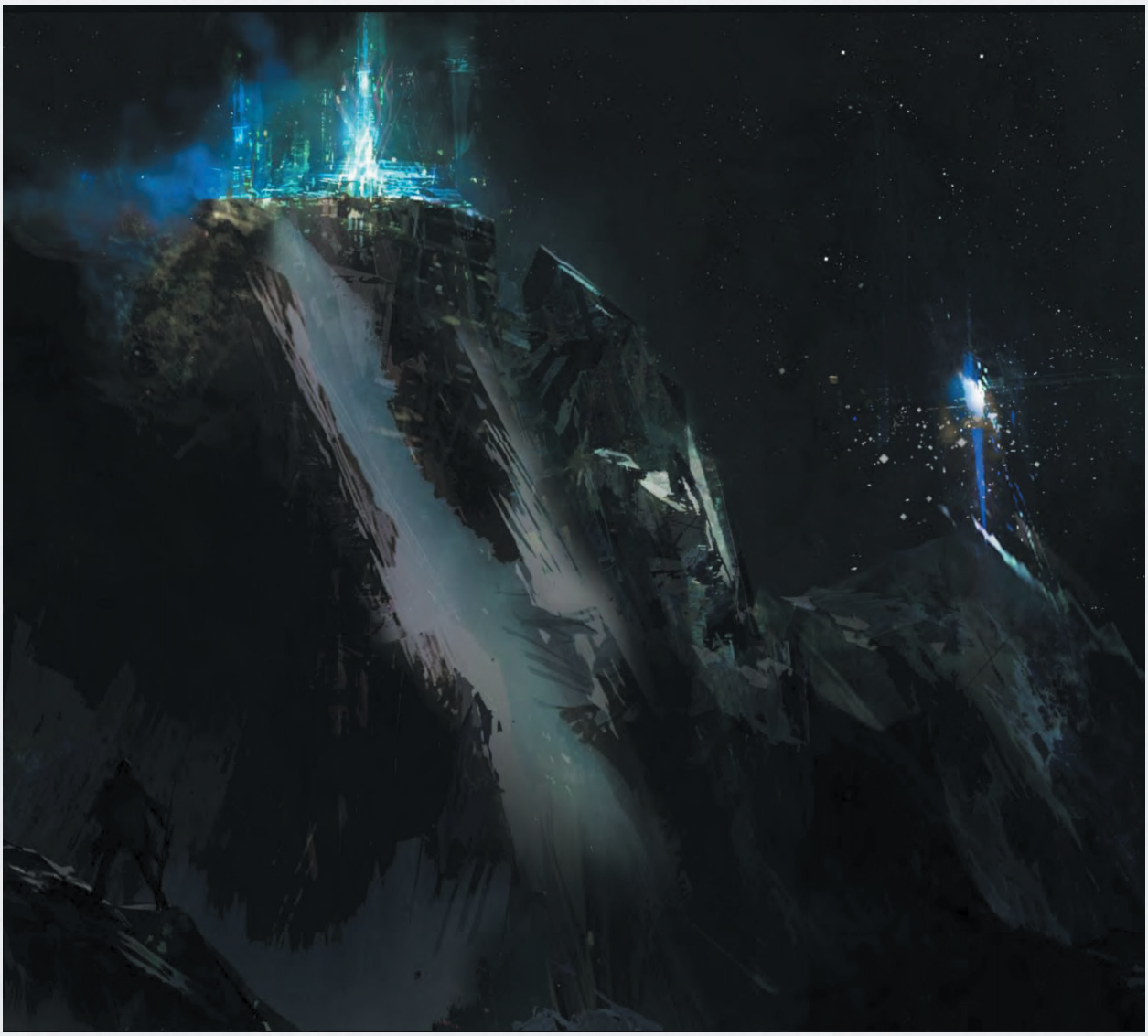
- A merchant of the Agora demands payment in trade and will only hand over the goods the characters need if they will obtain for him two medium-ish aethersaurs (which have recently become quite fashionable). Unfortunately, once removed from Aethersaur Island the dinos' mood-controlling aether-boxes malfunction, setting wild saurians loose on the Grand Stair!

- Journey past the edge of the world. Nicolas Tezla and a band of daring explorers launch an expedition of steam ships and micro-zeppelins to the stormy horizon, testing whether Aethersaur Island stands alone in this brave new world. Skirting the monster-infested, Shadow-edged rim of reality is treacherous in the extreme, but somewhere out there is... another island?! Forget everything you think you know about this Gossamer world – there's more out there.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

The Black



by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: The Black

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Special Thanks to Jason Durall for his help in developing this.

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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"The shattered limestone hallway receded as the crumbling stone slabs faded into rubble, then gravel, then dust, diminishing with every step until I found myself walking along a hallway made of nothing at all. Treading on invisible floors and running my hand against nonexistent walls, I ventured further into the void until I reached an enormous helical crystal staircase, which glimmered before a backdrop of swirling galaxies. Ascending in a spiral as wide as a moon and as tall as the heavens, the crystal staircase led – eventually – to a veritable constellation of obsidian Doors, each knob glinting with starlight.

- Yaeger's Travelogue

The Black is a vast and ancient cosmos – a gigantic gossamer reality comprised of innumerable star systems and galaxies whirling in the far-flung reaches of cold, black space. It is a realm where alien wolds abound, intergalactic empires are a dime a dozen, and faster-than-light travel is the lifeblood of star-spanning civilization.

Among the Gossamer Lords and various other beings who walk the Grand Stair, the Black is a well-known, commonly traversed, and tactically significant gossamer reality. Multiple Gossamer Lords hold dominion over small sections of the reality, usually claiming one planet or perhaps even an entire solar system as their Domain and shaping local gossamer reality according to their whim. However, since the space of the Black as a whole is so incredibly spacious, it barely feels like anyone has claimed any part of it at all. Spread out across the realm's vast breadth – and I really do mean 'how-many-galaxies-over-do-we-need-to-go' vast – there are many Doors by which one can exit onto different spans of the Grand Stair, which would be incomprehensibly distant from each other, if one were to simply climb it straight. Conveniently, faster-than-light starcraft are both celebrated and abundant throughout the multitudinous advanced star-faring civilizations; they've got warp drives, hyperspace engines, jump gates, "stable" wormholes, even the folding of time-space itself. Hence, so long as you have access to such transportation (and the luck and stomach to survive the ride), the Black serves as a valuable hub for travel in between distant locations on the Grand Stair.

The Black is a realm of science, driven to galaxy-spanning greatness by its inhabitants' unquenchable thirst for knowledge and mastery as they reach for – and strive to keep – their place among the stars. Super-genius astrophysicists and intrepid stardrive engineers abound, bandying learned technobabble back and forth, explaining the ebb and flow of their gossamer reality in terms of anti-particles and graviton fields, tachyon emissions and time-space singularities. It's fascinating, albeit exhausting. The rigors of the scientific paradigm are hardly a limit on wonder – a great multitude of star-faring civilizations have advanced their intelligence and technologies to the point of regularly performing the miraculous: terraforming, teleportation, faster-than-light interstellar travel, post-fusion energy sources, spontaneous cellular regeneration, radical genetic engineering, true artificial intelligence... the list goes on. But the point is that if you can imagine it, they've probably figured out a way to do it within the rules of physics.

Science isn't the end of the equation, however. While not-so-scientific magical energy is (or at least *was*) exceedingly rare and underused in this realm of hard science, as magic is wont to do it has found a way to sneak in through the cracks of reality. For eons the gossamer reality of the Black was stable and dependable, with the lock step of scientific cause and effect ensured by the strong influence of the Eidolon. Then, approximately thirty years ago, the Black began experiencing catastrophic surges of Umbral influence coupled with an equally disastrous waxing and waning of the Eidolon; all the turmoil you might expect from such upheaval followed, along with unprecedented fonts of magical energy produced by the newfound friction between clashing cosmic forces. The calamities have been isolated and sporadic thus far, but to this day the entire gossamer reality continues to fray and fracture: planets wobble in their orbits, once-empty vacuums erupt with spontaneous madness, and timeless intergalactic empires teeter on the verge of collapse. Moreover, the denizens of the Black's starry civilizations have come to realize that *something* is wrong, and they're going nuts trying to do something about it.

Typical Denizens

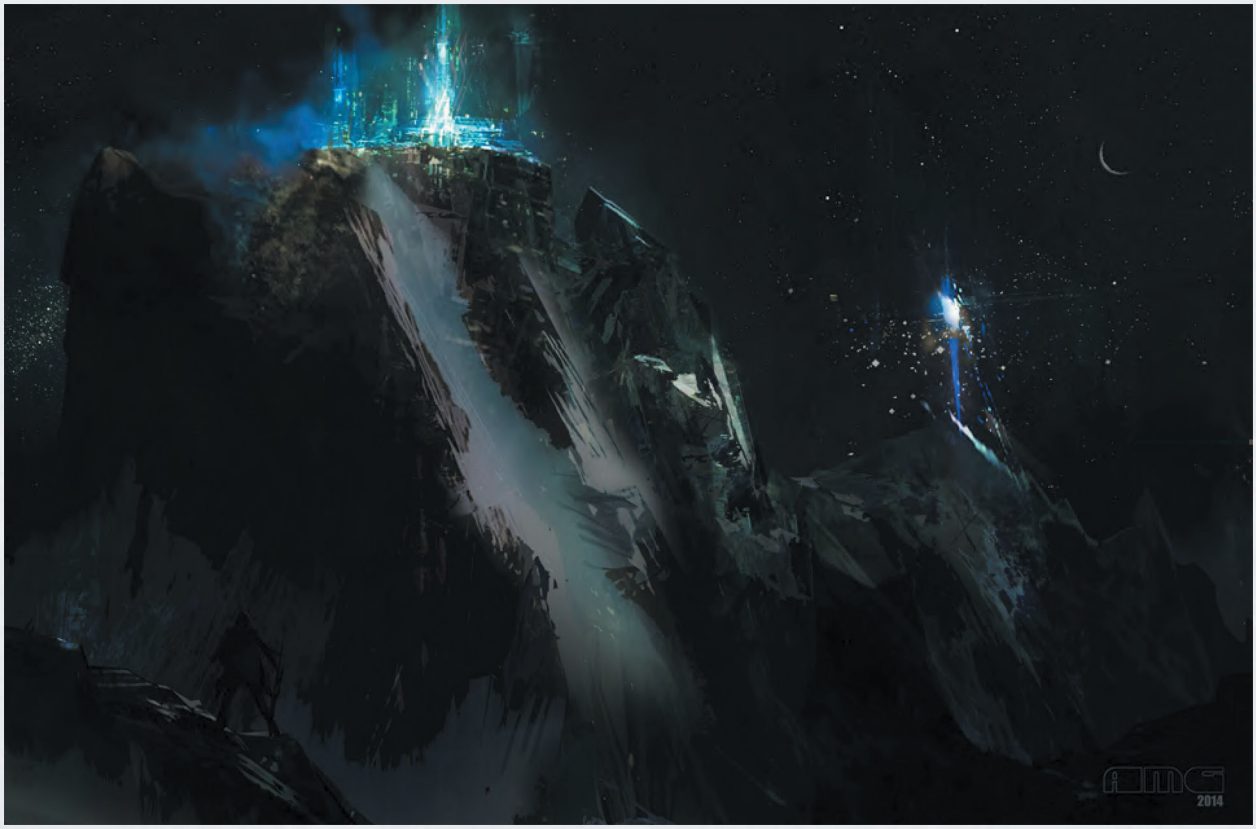
Being a vast multi-galactic cosmos, the Black is filled with aliens and life forms of every shape, size, and sentience. Listing them all would be impossible, but I'll try and give you a sense of what's out there – *way* out there.

Humans and humanoids are plentiful and widespread in their various home worlds, colonies, and empires, though, aside from their home systems they certainly don't constitute a majority of the Black's intelligent life forms. If and when you visit, keep in mind that most of the races I'd label as 'human' call themselves something entirely different. They in fact sneer at the mention of the 'h-word', but let's face it – extra wrinkles on your forehead, oddly colored skin, and/or an abundance of facial tattoos don't really make that much difference to a Gossamer Lord, but don't tell them that. Human-alien hybrids are quite common in many systems, thanks to the species' ever-reliable predilection for eagerly cross-breeding with anything with a pulse and a tight space suit – a trait for which I remain eternally grateful, since I don't know how I'd while away long deep-space voyages otherwise. By the way, should you ever meet a brunette by the name of Captain Thessaly Rackham, please tell her Captain Hunter deeply regrets that faux pas with the *C.C.P. Jormungandr*, the black hole, and those Parvalian pleasure-droids... and after that you'd better run before she tosses you out an airlock.

While hardly a complete listing, I'll mention a few human/humanoid civilizations by name:

The Confederacy of Colonial Planets is a fractious alliance of human systems with an aggressive fleet of exploratory vessels and terraforming engines, notorious for expansionist policies and a callous lack of regard for indigenous alien ecosystems. Confederate colonies are everywhere – freshly terraformed frontiers where a traveler could disappear amongst the hordes of drifting pilgrims and hardscrabble settlers, or, with a meager expenditure of wealth and power, shape a raw planet in their image.

The Holy Ur-Ra Empire is a galaxy-spanning imperial civilization rightly feared for their vast armada of warships, legions of genetically engineered cybernetic-enhanced super-soldiers, and a zealous devotion to their (supposedly) immortal space-pharaoh. Most Ur-Ra citizens live existences focused on the labyrinthine intrigues



of imperial status, constantly scheming to gain or keep power by amassing wealth, earning glory for the empire, and/or backstabbing one's peers. Despite exercising dominion over an entire galactic quadrant for millennia, the Ur-Ra god-emperor and Pharaoh-of-the-Many-Suns Osiri-Nef has a pathological fear of losing control, and thus has a dangerous inclination to enslave or eradicate with nuclear fire any aberrations (read: powerful interlopers) which threaten to upset the gleaming perfection of his glorious eternal empire.

The Orphans of Gaia are a widely scattered but pervasive "earthling" human cult who claim that the one true Earth vanished in an apocalyptic alien attack ages ago and is destined to be re-discovered, whereupon humanity will ascend to dominate the universe (though prophesy is terribly vague as to what *that* entails). While other races dismiss the Orphans as starry-eyed fanatics chasing a myth, I wouldn't be so sure... Earths are tenacious, and the Orphans' radical new messiah has discovered a dangerously potent wellspring of freshly-erupted magical power on a remote desert planet, all the better to fuel their holy quest – and eradicate humanity's competition.

Not-so-humanoid sentient alien races also abound throughout the Black – squid-like aquatic races, hive-minded insectoids, silicon-based intelligent oozes, photosynthetic plant-creatures, incorporeal energy-beings – too many to possibly list them all, but I'll mention a few which left an impression.

The K'Chuulazzdi are a race of amphibious crustaceans which inhabit the watery planet Laguna inside the volatile nebula known as the Genesis Cloud (more on that later). Physically, the K'Chuulazzdi are scuttling, lobster-like creatures with spiny shell-covered bodies, usually the size of a large dog. Based heavily on aquatic biological systems, K'Chuulazzdi technology yields little in the way of hardware or starships, but they excel in disciplines such xenobiology, biochemistry, genetics, and medicine; massive mega-coral reefs serve as their architecture and genetically engineered anemone-brains operate as supercomputers. Curious, clever, and eager to socialize with other races, many K'Chuulazzdi have left their watery homeworld to serve on alien starships as physicians, xenobiologists, and chefs. An exemplary K'Chuulazzdi and personal friend of mine, T'Kriigi, was the galley master *and* ship's doctor of the *C.C.P. Jormungandr* for years before that vessel's fateful scuttling. Should you ever find yourself on Laguna, you can rely on T'Kriigi to be a generous host and knowledgeable gossip, and if you tell him Captain Hunter sent you, he'll likely make you a pot of his disturbingly delicious proto-lobster bisque while he plies you for information as to my whereabouts.

The Centaurox are the dominant force in Omega Centauri, a globular cluster of millions of stars and attendant planetary systems packed into an area about 150 light years across

– a region rife with Centaurox battle stations, churning furnace-planets, and exotic but bloody hunting worlds. Proud and bellicose, the Centaurox civilization is fond of conquest; while they are an intelligent species perfectly capable of art, empathy, and rational diplomacy, over the ages they've simply chosen the path of 'might makes right' more often than not. Physically, Centaurox are formidable – hulking eight-limbed beasts of rippling muscle and dense bone, constructed as if one made a centaur out of equal parts bull, gorilla, and human bodybuilder. An adult Centaurox can weigh several tons, and their bulging biceps are easily strong enough to rip the head off any humanoid – a fact they're quite fond of advertising. Militarily, Centaurox battle-fleets are some of the most aggressive and dangerous in their respective quadrant, though the less-than-cutting-edge hyperdrive engines on their warships render them a bit slow, which is probably a good thing for the rest of known space. Once you get past the constant threats and patronizing arm-wrestling challenges, the Centaurox really do have a beautiful culture, which values family, honor, and strength. A full-blown Centaurox drum-opera (tradition-ally involving three hundred frenzied percussionist-warriors, explosives, and a generous number of alien blood sacrifices) is a terrifying yet seismically moving experience, so if they ever take you captive there's a bright side to sticking around for the show.

Non-biological sentience is prevalent in the Black – artificial intelligences, droids, 'bots, mechanoids, synthetic autonomous organisms, duplicates, constructed men – whichever variety of walking, talking computer going by whatever you want to call them. While, as you might expect, a great number of these robot-esque beings toil along as property of their creators, the Black has numerous planetary systems inhabited entirely by non-biological beings who have gained their freedom and now exist as entirely self-sufficient, self-determining beings. Geox-10, for instance, is a dead moon with a massive computer mainframe in place of its core, its surface populated by millions of human-like (and stranger) synthoids who each wirelessly embody fragments of the moon's unified artificial intelligence. Possessed of much longer life spans and less emotional baggage than their meat-sack contemporaries, synthetic life forms have the potential to develop and ascend far beyond the bounds of normal beings. One day, mark my words, a true Gossamer Lord will rise from the ranks of these mechanical men, and the Black will become the Domain of a brand new breed of power that will shake the cosmos.

Threats

Space itself is an incredibly dangerous environment, and don't ever forget it. Vast radiation-filled vacuums are terribly inhospitable places, and even for those super-tough Gossamer Lords who might not die outright from exposure, drifting cold and alone for a few light years until

you fall into the nearest gravity well, if any, will probably delay your travels on the Grand Stair no matter who you are. Likewise, even though we adore and romanticize interstellar travel, remember how perilous it can be; one bad navigation calculation can teleport you into the center of a planet, or plot your hyperdrive course through a black hole. So, when the nice starship captain tells to shut up, buckle your seat belt, and be patient, you'd better listen unless you want to get out and walk.

Mycoxene is not a person, nor a race, nor a technology – it is a sentient alien infection that is part virus, part fungus, and in advanced manifestations takes over the brains and bodies of its hapless zombie-like hosts. Beginning as virus-like spores then growing into fibrous molds and then massive clusters of ropy gray tendrils, mycoxene colonies not only feed on available life forms but also model their genomes upon the patterns of their hosts, creating compatible biologies capable of replacing organs and taking over minds. Mycoxene is sentient once developed to sufficient size (a patch the mass of one human body will do), and moreover mycoxene retains information and communicates with itself genetically, with messages passing along its insidious fibrous networks as surely as any wired internet. A fully infected humanoid obeys the will of the colony, sometimes even after death if the fungus has had enough time to devour and replace the host's vital organs and grow more resilient and compliant fungal copies inside the

Mycoxene Infestation

Battling infection by mycoxene is a challenge of Endurance. A small or minimal amount of mycoxene, such as a single infected human crew member or a mycoxene-tainted object, is sufficient to overcome a person with Average-ranked Endurance; a larger and more developed mycoxene colony, such as three crew members or an infested, tendril-covered room, can potentially overcome a Superior-ranked Endurance. Overcoming a Paragon-ranked Endurance might require dozens of lesser mycoxene hosts mobbing a powerful target, immersing the target in the heart of an overgrown colony, or combining exposure with some debilitating effect or injury to weaken the body's defenses. Once infected, a host can be 'saved' within a few days through medical intervention, potent antibiotics, or other means, but if the mycoxene has devoured and replaced any vital organs, curing the infection may still result in death, though a fungal copy of the host's brain may exist physically – or at least genetically – within the colony.

captured body (referred to rather unscientifically as "swapping gray meat for red meat"). Mycoxene infections can begin innocuously – some wispy strands hanging from a bulkhead, or a crew member's pounding headache and sudden mood shift – but once an infection takes root, you'd better cleanse everything with fire lest the entire ship or planet become a mycoxene breeding engine. Sentients infected with mycoxene tendrils have their brains rewritten until they do the bidding of the colony, neutralizing and infecting their cohorts until the entire environment is the dominion of the fungus and it can then set its sights on the next ship, planet, or civilization. Mycoxene colonies grow in collective strength according to their size and the caliber of the host being genetics they infest and co-opt, so while a single ship's cat is unlikely to be a threat initially, even a Gossamer Lord should shudder at the thought of being held down by a dozen tendril-decked Centaurox bellowing "join us".

Pharaoh-of-the-Many-Suns Orifi-Nef, haughty god-emperor of the Holy Ur-Ra Empire, has extended his life for millennia through the selfish hoarding of the greatest discoveries the Black has to offer. He has spent that time gathering an arsenal of potent alien artifacts to ensure none are used against him – and that he might use them against any rival, should any appear who might actually pose a threat. While Osiri-Nef (despite his bluster) is not a personal challenge to a Gossamer Lord in terms of psychic power or physical might, his weapons and doomsday devices are certainly enough to kill even a walker of the Grand Stair. Ur-Ra battle cruisers – those immense black pyramid-shaped warships which serve as the space-pharaoh's personal conveyance and elite guard – are usually equipped with energy canons capable of eradicating planets, missiles that can trigger a spontaneous black hole, and "disportation" field projectors that can really ruin your day by teleporting every particle of your ship to a different, random sector of space. Osiri-Nef is hardly the only space-warlord with such weapons of mass destruction at his beck and call, he just comes to mind as the most recent galactic despot to threaten a planet I liked with outright disintegration. So I'll just say that when adventuring in the Black it's best not to underestimate the potential firepower at the other end of an angry hailing frequency.

Notable locations

Helion's Cage is a space station the size of a solar system, sprawling over an ancient but operational Dyson shell – an immense spherical megastructure surrounding Helion, the system's intense orange-yellow sun, in a complex latticework of solar panels, habitation rings, and miscellaneous advanced space-machinery. Viewed from the edge of space, the sphere looks like flame inside a burning censer – strange, magnificent, yet almost lonely, as it is the only body in the system (every other planet, moon, or asteroid that might've once shared its sky having been dismantled long ago and used as construction-matter). Harvesting over 90% of Helion's bountiful solar radiation, the Cage's inhabitants utilize that awesome power on an equally-awesome surface area over 500 million times that of the average Earth-planet. Trillions of souls reside in the Cage's various ringed supercities in a usually-peaceful hyper-cosmopolitan society based on star-faring industry, intergalactic trade, and cross-species mingling. In a galaxy full of exceptional spaceports, Helion's Cage still ranks as one of the best; tens of thousands of shipyards and docking arrays dot the shell's exterior, and thousands of jump-gates near the system make it a nexus for intergalactic travel. One of the Black's most commonly-known Doors opens into an observation deck located on the edge of one of the Cage's equatorial habitation rings. It provides an unobstructed view of both the vast interior of this sun-in-a-bottle, and, looking the other direction, a glimpse out into the void of space and the endless swarms of starcraft flitting to and fro like fireflies in the night.

The Genesis Cloud is an immense purplish nebula approximately 100 light years in diameter, which of late, has become an epicenter for the massive cosmic upheaval rippling across the Black. While local scientists have all manner of techno-babble explanations for what is going on ("cascading temporal anomalies", "entropic anti-particle showers", "hyper-accelerated proto-planetary accretion"), in terms more familiar to Gossamer Lords: the Eidolon and Umbra are spiking and clashing, and said friction is seriously screwing with gossamer matter, the time flow, and producing surges of magical energy in a realm where "magic" has never

Planet-Killers, Super-Lasers, and other Weapons of Mass Destruction

Even though they're built by mortal hands according to the laws of science, weapons of mass destruction may still possess qualities typically reserved for artifacts. Any weapon capable of destroying a starship likely possesses the Double Damage [2 Points] quality (at the very least), and any weapon capable of eradicating a planet (or worse) should be considered to have the Deadly Damage [4 Points] quality. Conversely, powerful force fields, energy shields, or other protective technologies may grant comparable defensive qualities up to and including Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]. Greater qualities may also be appropriate, at the cautious discretion of the gamemaster, though you'd better be careful where you point that thing.

been the accepted power paradigm. The nebula is unpredictable and dangerous. Cosmic storms rip through the region at random, disintegrating vessels and outposts then vanishing without a trace. New solar systems have been popping up spontaneously, with nascent stars and planets forming in mere days instead of over billions of years. On these bleeding-raw "cradle-planets", life forms evolve at hyper-accelerated rates, and xeno-biologists from across the galaxy flock to these mysterious crucibles to study the phenomenon – and perform their own radical experiments. The Cloud has also become holy ground for several ancient religions once thought extinct in the Black; hidden within the nebula, mystic orders are reviving long-forgotten rites to harness this sudden wellspring of sorcerous power. As if the place wasn't weird enough, a large portion of the nebula itself has become "Uo" – a newly sentient, massively-dispersed gaseous energy being dozens of light years across. There's at least one Door inside the nebula, linked to the medical bay of a xenobiological research facility on the cradle-planet Laguna, home to the lobster-like K'Chuulazzdi, a tempestuous seascape overgrown with luminescent mega-coral and infested with curious faerie-like insectoids, which will, believe me, totally gum your engines if you don't shoo all the power-siphoning little bastards out before ignition.

Final Thoughts

The Black is an amazing place where even someone comfortable with the limitless stairways of the infinite multiverse can look out upon the distant stars and feel small. Unmatched in terms of scale and the promise of adventure, I recommend you pay this place a visit and bring enough with you to hire a fast ship. There's a lot to see, and it is glorious.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Post-Fusion
Magic Level:	Rare
Security:	Communication Barrioer [1 Point]
Type:	Primal World [4 Points] (vast, with multiple simultaneous owners)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to owner's planet/system)
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Powerful/Weak* Umbra – Weak/Powerful* Wrighting – Blocked
*Special:	The Black is presently in a state of tremendous cosmic upheaval, with the influence of the Eidolon and Umbra fluctuating wildly from time to time and from place to place. These fluctuations impact the strength and availability of magical energy; while mystical power is very spare in most of the Black, in selective areas it is quite potent.

How to Use The Black

- The Black is a star-spanning setting for adventurous tales of intergalactic exploration and epic science fiction. Use this super-huge reality as a reminder of the scope of some of the Gossamer worlds that are out there, and by extension the unimaginable vastness of the multiverse and the Grand Stair.

- Use the Black as a nexus for travel along the Grand Stair. This Gossamer world contains a plethora of Doors scattered across its starry reaches, making it a valuable hub for adventurers who can finagle transport aboard a starship in order to bridge the gaps. When the characters acquire a legendary star map containing the locations of hundreds of Doors, they'll realize that a warp-speed transfer across the Black may be better than climbing a million flights of stairs.

- Bizarre life forms abound in space, so use the Black as an opportunity to explore the far-out possibilities for alien life and remember that humanoids are but a tiny fraction of life in the multiverse. Play gravity tag with the sentient waveforms of the Xantigar cluster. Listen to the songs of brain-reefs dominating the bottoms of ocean-planets. Get weird, then get weirder.

- An enemy of the Gossamer Lords has discovered the wellspring of power that is the Genesis Cloud, with plans on using the nebula's cradle-planets as genetic crucibles and time-accelerated breeding grounds for a new race of super-soldiers. Can the characters stop this growing menace before it spills onto the Grand Stair? The plot thickens when they realize that the genetic source-material for this too-familiar warrior race comes from a source very, very close to them.

- Enjoy some epic space battles. The Black is filled with intergalactic empires and alien armadas eager to smash legions of starships together in ship-to-ship combat. Even if the characters don't care who wins, navigating their way across war zones which are light years across is a worthy hurdle, and among the wreckage and wounded they might find something worth caring about.

- An ally becomes infected with an alarmingly tenacious strain of the sentient alien virus/fungus mycoxene, and, in order to develop a cure the characters must quest to recover a fresh sample of "raw" mycoxene from an infested system deep in the Black. Along the way they discover that this strain is so potent because it has already tasted Gossamer Lord genes, revealing the plot of an Umbra Master determined to spread himself/herself/itself virally across all existence!

- Something has recently upset the longstanding cosmic equilibrium of the Black, and unprecedented friction between the Eidolon and the Umbra has resulted in surges of magical energy which threaten to destabilize this vast reality. Many Gossamer Lords consider the Black "too big to fail", so the characters are tasked by a mentor with discovering the cause of this chaos and seeing whether it can be reversed – or at least contained. On a remote planet the earthling cult known as the Orphans of Gaia celebrate the ancient prophecy responsible, but these starry-eyed fanatics are merely pawns for an agency with larger plans and reach across the multiverse.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

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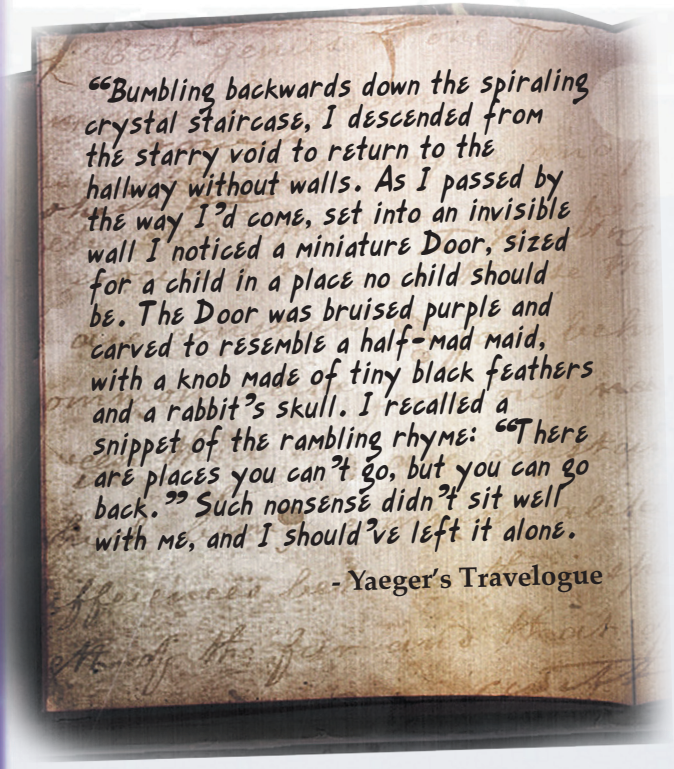
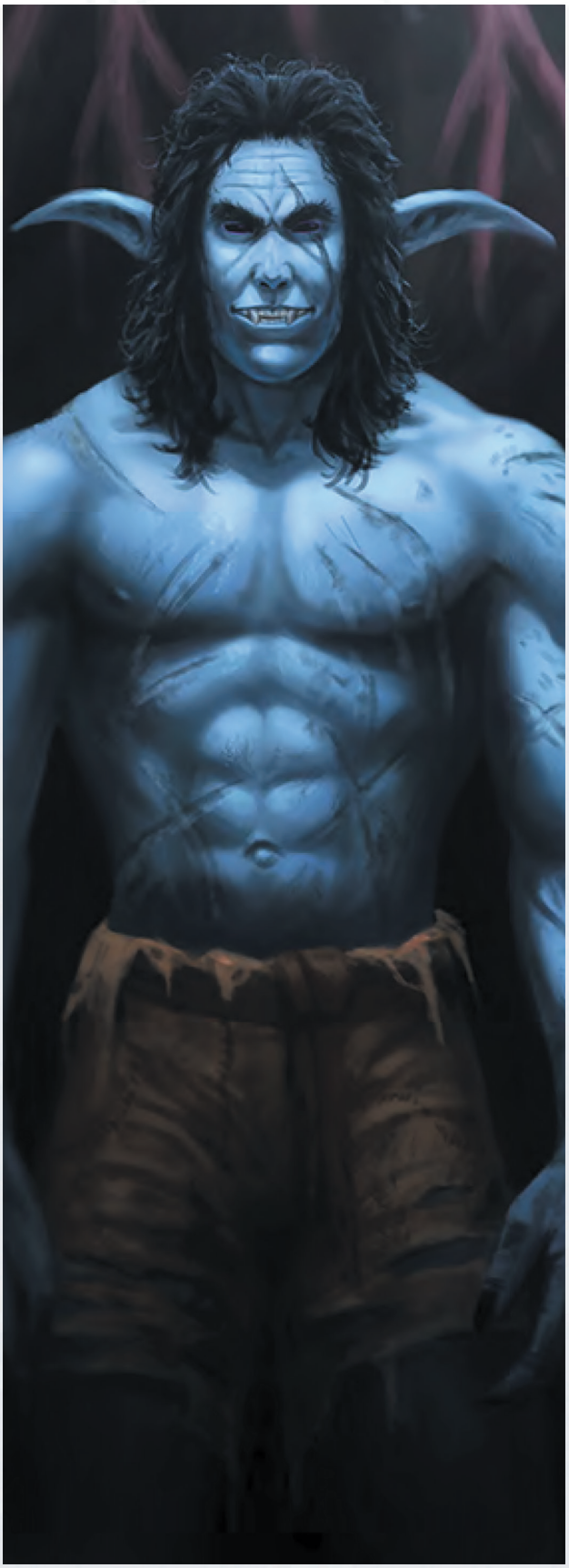


"Bumbling backwards down the spiraling crystal staircase, I descended from the starry void to return to the hallway without walls. As I passed by the way I'd come, set into an invisible wall I noticed a miniature Door, sized for a child in a place no child should be. The Door was bruised purple and carved to resemble a half-mad maid, with a knob made of tiny black feathers and a rabbit's skull. I recalled a snippet of the rambling rhyme: "There are places you can't go, but you can go back." Such nonsense didn't sit well with me, and I should've left it alone.

- Yaeger's Travelogue

GlimmerGloam is a topsy-turvy realm of dangerous nonsense and wicked whimsy, the wonders of its faerie forests and ghostly groves constantly overshadowed with the threat – or promise, if it suits you – of entropy, impermanence and transformation. And, to be clear, it is really, *really* weird. Unsurprisingly, GlimmerGloam is a place where the chaos and constant change of the Umbra blunders about at full strength, trampling egos and expectations at every turn, though, I'll be honest, the place never really seems all that hell-bent on death and destruction – that's just the way things are.

GlimmerGloam is a relatively small Gossamer world, perhaps the size of a kingdom or four, though its topography isn't reliably three-dimensional, its shape is neither that of a globe-shaped planet nor a flat map, and any measurements ever made or postulated about its actual length or breadth or width would, scientifically, be complete gobbledegook. You could probably walk across the whole realm in a week, unless the path looped around on you, which it probably would if you let on that you were counting steps. Landscape-wise, most of GlimmerGloam resembles temperate pastoral countryside, full of rolling hills and tangled thickets, dipping low into grassy plains, boggy swamps, and further down into subterranean burrows so deep they empty out into the sky between the stars. There's a sun and a moon, but you can't visit them and they don't have



anything resembling coherent celestial orbits. Also, there are lots of floating islands and castles in the clouds, because that's a thing. There are little villages and big houses, plenty of paths but few roads, and here and there you'll find monolithic standing stones and the ruins of an ancient civilization who the residents will say just stepped out for an errand and will be right back in a moment so make yourself at home and don't mind the mess.

There are *notions* about existence in GlimmerGloam – I won't call them rules, because if they were rules they'd be broken all the time, and if they were broken all the time somebody might care, which nobody does, but nevertheless they're important to keep in mind when trying to understand GlimmerGloam, which you really shouldn't attempt, but still some things are worth mentioning:

Nothing in GlimmerGloam is just one thing. The flower at your feet may be a red-tipped tulip, but it is also the diminutive nymph Miss Sansia Petalfrock, and also a frog's trumpet, and also a golden dagger fresh with the blood of jabberdrakes. It seems that no being is ever just a single way, and multiple conflicting narratives for a person, creature, or object might be true simultaneously, or oftentimes alternating with the uneven cycles of night and day – a common trigger for the transformation from nice to nasty. In the light, creatures and environments soften and take on a happy hue; when darkness falls, however, the world bends towards the sinister, smiles turn upside-down, and the knives come out. For instance, the BungleCat is a helpless kitten first thing in the morning, a genteel host at afternoon tea time, a xenophobic stalker at dusk, a slavering predator in the dark, and sometimes all at once in the glow of moonlight. Aside from being terribly confusing, the plethora of shifting identities makes it very difficult to make agreements or trust anyone; a GlimmerGloam denizen can swear fealty without the faintest hint or intention of deception, yet betray that oath in a heartbeat when considering the matter in a different light. It's a tough places to make allies, unless you're accustomed to being disappointed and betrayed.

The world is what you make it. The gossamer reality of GlimmerGloam is highly mutable, with a scope that can be either regional, local, or even

personal. Beings with no conscious knowledge of the nature of gossamer reality or the greater mysteries of the multiverse can nevertheless bend and warp the gossamer reality around them to suit their desires, expectations, and personal paradigms. Some beings in GlimmerGloam walk about in self-prescribed, self-affirming daydream bubbles, oblivious and indifferent to the contrary existences of others. The concept of things being more than one thing at once also applies to history and the twisted arrow of time itself. What you ate for breakfast or how old you are is never a certainty, even though it has already happened; the here-and-now at any given moment depends more on the consensus will of those present and less on anything so confining as an immutable linear chain of past cause and effect. From what I can tell, any changes you imagine or enforce about yourself and your personal history vanish like the nonsense they are the instant you leave GlimmerGloam, so it isn't possible to pretend you spent the last hundred years learning sorcery and have it stick, but I'll warn you that it *is* possible to misremember your existence enough to get seriously stuck. There's at least one wayward Warden of the Grand Stair trapped in GlimmerGloam after a calamitous mishap of playing-pretend, now convinced they are '*the most delicious slice of cake*' and nothing more, so the poor shmuck has been sitting on a saucer for decades waiting to be eaten.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The Eidolon is present in GlimmerGloam, albeit at a distinct disadvantage; you can feel it struggling, clawing, *yearning* to bring some vague semblance of order and permanence to this madcap world, but usually only succeeding in creating repetitive patterns – echoes, iterations of an ideal, or a memory copied over and over, each destined to be washed way like a perfect little sandcastles at the mercy of the surf. Nothing lasts, but if you see something once you're likely to see it again. Killing rarely ends a conflict with the average GlimmerGloam denizen, because dead creatures are prone to resurrection, replacement by an improbably convenient twin or understudy, or beings may simply ignore the supposed "fact" of their death entirely, blithely showing up the next day as if nothing out-of-sorts occurred at all. Sometimes scenes, days, or entire years repeat themselves like reruns of a half-rehearsed skit,

playing out the same as events did the last time or as variations on a theme, spiraling recursively over and over until a foreign observer (as in, a traveler from outside the reality, so probably *you*) takes notice and is rude enough to mention such unmentionables in mixed company – a common yet serious faux pas likely to raise their ire.

If all this sounds confusing, that's because it is.

Typical Denizens

GlimmerGloam is a "faerie" realm of sorts, one of many such fey worlds scattered up and down the Grand Stair from here to eternity. While the

world's confines are populated by a plethora of species of easily recognizable faerie-kin (pixies, changelings, trolls, etc.), this particular gossamer reality twists many expectations of the fair folk one might've derived from other worlds, meaning the only sure thing is that nothing is sure. Or safe. Or sane.

Beastlies are animalistic fey, running the gamut of anthropomorphic animals all the way from talking mice to furry-eared elves with fox tails or goat hooves. This includes bunnybriars, satyrs, kitsune, puca, tengu, molemen, ratkin, bumblebeavers, drakelings, jabberwonks, dodo-boys, and a host of other furry, scaly, and frilly misfits. While an individual beastlie tends to resemble only a single creature (except for the chimericans), beastlies are fond of shapeshifting between forms and are the most prone to changing their seemings and demeanor based on the light of day or the dark of night. Snuggly bundles of beastlies basking in the sun sing merry songs and are as cute as the dickens, but when the gloaming-time comes they hunt in packs and their howls bring nightmares to the land.

Trowls (that's how they spell it, when they spell it at all) are breeds of giant trolls – lumpy, lumbering, horn-headed oafs ranging in height from eight feet to eight stories. They mumble grumpy things like 'I could eat you, puny bug' all the time, but they're lethargic and forgetful, so they rarely bother with attacks or vendettas.

Most trowls are just big dumb goons, and the bigger they are, the slower and dumber they are. The largest trowls can be mistaken for oddly-shaped hills, covered in so much dirt and vegetation that they blend into the landscape, which usually suits them fine since having a hut built on your nose is a nice way to keep company close – until they become bothersome and need to be squished, that is. Trowls are slow to react, reluctant to change, and relatively receptive to the Eidolon, making them far more reliable than the other fey of GlimmerGloam, but these giant lummoxes have their own dangers. While trowls don't change their seemings very much from day to night, and a trowl's mind tends to forget nearly every slight or harm, a trowl's body quietly soaks up scars, wounds, and thorns until the moment some final straw breaks the proverbial camel's back and the tormented trowl goes berserk, embarking on a suicidal/homicidal rampage. A rampaging trowl is an unrelenting juggernaut of destruction (with the eldest strong enough to overpower a less-than-robust Gossamer Lord), and such a sad and dangerous happening is usually cause for the entirety of the realm to either run and hide or join in murderous rioting to celebrate the occasion.

Snee are the most human-seeming of the GlimmerGloam fey, but that isn't saying much; while they traipse about on two legs in fine clothes and fancy hats, they're freaks and weirdoes to

a one. Fond of transforming themselves with radical body modifications, Snee can remove their limbs at will and commonly do, swapping appendages amongst each other, replacing bits with objects, and letting unattached hands skitter about like wayward pets. They tend to be obsessive and controlling, fixating on their appearance, or courtly etiquette, or bizarre collections like broken clocks, poisoned tea cups, or the severed ears of people who like to listen to their jokes. Snee make up the urbane aristocracy of GlimmerGloam, holding leadership roles and courtly positions as they scrape and scheme to gain the favor of their fickle, fractured sovereign, the Rabbit Queen.

Gremlords are sort of like the older, more regal, more evolved cousins of gremlins. Every bit as reckless and mischievous as their gremlin relatives, instead of being small and misshapen gremlords are physically impressive – tall, muscular, athletic, and perhaps even beautiful depending on your tastes. Typically blue-skinned, gremlords have all-black eyes, short fangs, pointy ears which droop like reeds, and an extra knuckle on each of their long, black-clawed fingers. They're contrary and iconoclastic to a fault, and have the effect of enforcing the social order in GlimmerGloam (that being, perpetual disorder) by bullying bullies and tearing down any too-big-for-their-britches snee institutions they find; rebellious gremlords are constantly in conflict with the Rabbit Queen, who remains a fixture as sovereign despite (perpetual yet futile) gremlord plots to discourage, unseat, or assassinate her. Gremlords have great potential for power, either martial or mystical, and from their ranks you're likely to see GlimmerGloam's next champion of the Umbra and/or full-fledged walker of the Grand Stair.

Threats

The Rabbit Queen is a powerful Umbra Master who seized – or was seized *by* – GlimmerGloam as her personal Domain some time ago, and now she whiles away her days fretting with half-real companions, running through twisted woods, and holding audiences for her motley court of misfits and madmen. Unlike other Gossamer world sovereigns, she isn't a strict homebody and still uses her mastery of the Grand Stair to go wandering, escaping the troubles of her

realm from time to time, only to inevitably be drawn back. GlimmerGloam *needs* her, though I'm not certain if the relationship is as feared leader, cherished mother, or tormented hostage. Probably all of the above. I met the Rabbit Queen once upon the Stair, and she seemed sweet but damaged, like a gal who's been bitten by one to many dogs to ever trust again. As is the case with most Umbra Masters, the Rabbit Queen has changed her form and appearance several times over her last thousand years, but presently she looks like a teenage human girl with white hair, fond of long knives and cute dresses lined with rabbit fur. She often doesn't act her apparent age, wavering between wide-eyed baby talk and age-wizened acid wit, asking boldly for personal information and making inappropriate romantic advances just to unsettle folks and keep rivals off balance. It's more than a little creepy, and I've kept my distance. I swear. She always

seems a bit distracted, clutching at the golden pendant around her neck or bending her eye toward the mirror on the wall as if she saw a ghost. Her ruling style is very *laissez faire*, as she is reluctant to parcel out queenly decrees and finds administration deathly boring, though she remains lethally adamant that *she* is the one and only ruler of GlimmerGloam, and she's more than capable of lopping off heads, or inventing bizarre tortures to inflict on any subject or challenger who dares besmirch her claim.

The Rabbit Queen

Attributes

Psyche – 85 Points
Strength – 10 Points
Endurance – 35 Points
Warfare – 20 Points

Powers

Umbra Mastery [50 Points]
Master of the Grand Stair [35 Points]
Invocation [20 Points]
Sorcery [15 Points]
Cantrips [5 Points] – Charm, Eidolon Negation, Glitch, Quicken, Stun

Artifacts and Creatures

Slivver, the Queen's Blade [7 Points] – This long, slim knife has a narrow ivory handle and a blade carved from a shard of mirrored glass.

Deadly Damage [4 Points] – *Slivver* is a vorpal blade, capable of decapitating nearly anything with a single snicker-snack.

Named and Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points] – shifting in size and shape from tiny needle to gigantic great sword.

Limited Mold Gossamer Creatures [1 Point] – *Slivver* can heal any damage it inflicts within one day of causing a wound, including re-attaching severed heads and bringing the dead back to life.

The BungleBeasts [32 Points] – This dirty dozen of nightmarish monsters obey their queen's command – though she rarely commands them to do anything specific, and even when she does they're notoriously reckless in how they choose to obey. That said, the BungleBeasts *are* fiercely loyal to their queen and their homeland, and can be relied upon to slaughter invaders, watch Doors, and staunchly defend GlimmerGloam from outside threats.

Double Vitality [2 Points]
Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
Double Damage [2 Points]
Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point] – a variety of innate magical abilities
Regeneration [4 Points]
True Name is Warded [2 Points]
Named & Numbered [x2 Points] – including the BungleCat, BungleMouse, BungleCorn, BungleShrike, BungleGhost, BungleFish, BungleMoeba, Bungle-Bug, BungleWisp, BungleKing (not actually the king of anything), and a few more "secret" Bungles who change forms and identities so often it is useless to name or describe them.

Delirium, the Queen's Mirror [22 Points] – the Rabbit Queen's mirror is a potent artifact tied closely to the Queen's relationship with the Umbra, more of an inseparable companion than a piece of property. The Queen rarely uses the mirror consciously, as *Delirium* itself chooses when to become useful, if at all.

- Able to Speak and Reason [2 Points] – *Delirium* is fiendishly intelligent, but usually whispers only to the Rabbit Queen.
- Psychic Neutral [2 Points]
- Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 Points] – *Delirium* is on alert even when the Queen is distracted, warning of any serious dangers but content to let her suffer lesser pitfalls and indignities.

- True Name is Warded [2 Points]
- Regeneration [4 Points] – *Delirium* repairs from any harm, yet always remains cracked.
- Linked to the Umbra [2 Points]
- Named & Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points] – *Delirium* shifts form between a dozen different mirror-like objects, most commonly a full-length looking glass, an ivory-handled hand mirror, or a golden locket with a shattered mirror tucked inside.
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] – *Delirium* channels the Umbra to mold reality around the Rabbit Queen in accordance with her moods and fears (rarely her wishes), blooming life when she's happy, calling storms when she's worried, and setting the world afire when she's irate.

Stuff

Good [+3 Points]

The BungleCat is the most powerful and most cunning of the BungleBeasts – a wicked, mercurial predator with the genteel manners of a mafia consigliere and the lethal whimsy of a serial killer. He's part cat, part ogre, part dragon, and all demon. I hate this guy. Monsters and madmen I can deal with, but the insufferably smug smile of this feline freak just sets my soul on edge. As soon as you enter GlimmerGloam he's all over you, making bad puns and introducing you around, but as dusks sets in the nasty pranks begin, and then the insane tests, and by the time the night is deep and dark he's tried to kill you thrice over. And the next day, no matter how frothing mad you get, he'll say it was all in fun, and then do it all again if you let him. I'd tell you to avoid this beast at all costs, but he's the most well-connected creature in all of GlimmerGloam and tends to loiter around active Doors, so you just can't avoid him. Alas.

Slizzerphrix "the Throoty Burbler" was once a fearsome jabberwock and walker of the Grand Stair, but now the once-mighty monster exists only as an undead severed head, the victim of a calamitous decapitation suffered while adventuring in some far-off dream realm. Shipped home ignominiously in a coffin-sized music box wrought of lead and cold iron, the undead head of Slizzerphrix now serves as the most insane jack-in-the-box ever constructed. When the music box's handle is cranked – a favorite pastime of GlimmerGloam residents, who *love* to show it off to visitors – a creaky, off-pitch tune plays until the jabberwock's head pops up, burbling nonsense and blasting cross-eyed rays of fire from its big googly eyes. The cacophonous burbling is a potent psychic attack which inflicts madness and confusion on any who hear it, either whipping victims into a murderous frenzy or reducing them to babbling idiots. However, if you can calm Slizzerphrix down before it retracts back into the box, the lonely and depressed head loves to talk, which is surprisingly useful, if you can understand its rambling jabberwock jibber-jabber; Slizzerphrix once wandered an impressive range of the Grand Stair and still recalls a great deal about ancient traps, secret paths, and forgotten Doors.

The Secret of the Looking Glass

The mirror Delirium contains the soul of the Rabbit Queen's sister, whom the Queen sacrificed (murdered) as part of the Queen's ascension to become an Umbra Master ages ago. Delirium knows this, but the Rabbit Queen has forgotten due to Umbra-induced amnesia and the soul-shattering trauma of the event. The sister in the mirror sometimes appears as a twisted, red-headed reflection of the Queen dressed in crimson and spattered with blood, or as a fox with a dead white rabbit hanging limp in its teeth. The sister intends on haunting the Rabbit Queen for eternity, so while the mirror oftentimes plagues the Queen with tricks and torments, it/she will defend the Queen from mortal dangers with the utmost ferocity, warning the Queen of danger and augmenting her command of the Umbra to a frightful potency.

The Undead Head of Slizzerphrix, the Throoty Burbler, in a Big Weird Music Box

This can be an artifact with the following qualities: Double Damage [2 Points] (bite and fiery eye beams), Resistant to Firearms [2 Points], Able to Speak [1 Point], and Connected to the Grand Stair [1 Point]. Treat Slizzerphrix's madness-inducing burbling as a hearing-dependent psychic attack with an effective Psyche of 20.

Notable locations

The Most-Royal S'posed-to Floating Castle is s'posed to float. It doesn't. Maybe it did, once, and maybe it will again, but most of the time it blunders about the landscape, half-buoyant and half-crashed like some drunken sky-whale festooned with lop-sided turrets and scribbly banners. The trowl-bladder balloons keep popping, the roof-tethered flamingoes have gone on strike again, and efforts to train the staff to all jump at the same time and push at the ceiling are showing promise but are a long way from sustainable levitation. It's a fright. You might ask yourself: how could a powerful sorcerer and Master of the Grand Stair such as the Rabbit Queen have such a crappy castle? The answer is: the Queen doesn't give two shakes of a hare's hindquarters about the castle, but it is a favorite project of her fanatical subjects – mostly groveling beastlies and obsequious snees – and when pestered by a peon about what they can do to serve the crown, the Rabbit Queen blithely replies, "make my castle float". The place is a motley of architectural styles and mismatched fortifications, the long-suffering victim of hundreds of incompatible master plans by hundreds of different architects over the ages, all of whom were nuts and none of whom were engineers, pilots, or actual architects. At the front, a fortified drawbridge and crenellated stone wall stand shoulder-to-shoulder with a bank of stained glass picture windows and an open garden patio. At the rear, animated dodo-gargoyles guard the back gate, which is always left open because it's near the kitchen and the sweetmeat pies need to cool, didn't you know. Inside are plenty of wrong-sized tea parlors, unfinished towers which lead up into the basement, and a gorgeous grand throne room tiled like a white and red checkerboard, a vision of gleaming ivory and sumptuous bloodstone. The Rabbit Queen holds formal court in the castle from time to time, and when she does its halls are packed with subjects eagerly dancing to the house band – a severed-head symphony – or awaiting the latest unscheduled execution, which always occurs right on schedule.

The Wisping Woods constitutes much of GlimmerGloam's interior – a tangled forest replete with twisted thickets, winding paths, and dark little hollows carved into the hills. By day, the Wisping Woods can be a joyous place, filled with singing beastlies and seductive nymphs, but by night the woods are a maze of horrors, given over to fell spirits and stalked by the BungleBeasts. Will-o-wisps are abundant, giving the woods its name; these ghostly lanterns love to lure travelers off the trail with the promise of distant lights, or use their echoing voices to convince do-gooders there's someone in trouble out there in the dark. The woods' ever-shifting paths lead everywhere in GlimmerGloam, from Trowl-Tear Lake to the Topiary Plains, from the Upside-Down Mountain to the beastlie warrens and snee torture dens beneath BungleBarrow Hill.

The Cairn Cottage rests on the edge of the Wisping Wood in the midst of a tar-choked swamp which festers near the gap in the HalfShadow Cliffs. The cottage is made from piles of stacked gravestones made from shale

slabs from the nearby cliffs, which would make for a sturdy building if it wasn't perpetually sinking into the tarry swamp, creating an underground tower several hundred stories high – or deep, rather. The Cairn Cottage is the place where denizens of GlimmerGloam put their dead, whether in tight crypts niches carved into the walls, setting their ashes in a teapot on the mantle, or sitting the corpse upright in a chair – you know, in case they wake up after all. The cottage would probably be more full if death were always final in GlimmerGloam, which as I've mentioned it isn't, so the Cottage tends to give back a fair portion of its residents, like the time the snee BarbarySam died, was interred, but then the other snee called takey-backsies the next week and decided to make a new, thinner BarbarySam out of his bones. The place is thoroughly haunted, and is also a favorite resting spot of the BungleCat, who watches the most commonly-used Door into GlimmerGloam, which is in the cottage's ground floor front door, and which is bound to sink beneath the tar any day now.

Final Thoughts

GlimmerGloam is a frightful mess of nonsense. If you go, limit it to morning tea, or a single afternoon's delight, because it isn't a place you want to get stuck after dark. However, if it *is* the kind of place you want to get stuck after dark, maybe you and I shouldn't be friends.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Medieval
Magic Level:	Magic Replaces Technology
Security:	Kinda-Sorta Guarded [2 Points] (se *Veil of Confusion*; the Doors entering GlimmerGloam are "guarded" by the BungleBeasts, but that only half-counts because they let just about everybody through)
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: The Rabbit Queen)
Control:	Control of Destiny [4 Points]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Weak Umbra – Powerful Wrighting – Easily Used
*Special:	*Veil of Confusion*: While there is no communication barrier preventing Wrighting or other Powers from reaching across the veil of Shadow to or from GlimmerGloam, the communications sent or received are often garbled, twisted, or otherwise confused to some degree. The gamemaster should determine – either randomly or arbitrarily – how much of any given message is distorted, false, or utter nonsense. The same goes for any form of cross-worlds teleportation or other effect; travelers entering or leaving GlimmerGloam through any Power other than a Door may find themselves transported upside down, transformed, stripped, or otherwise discombobulated.

How to Use GlimmerGloam

- GlimmerGloam is a topsy-turvy land filled with dangerous nonsense – a place where the mutability and improbability of the Umbra really shines. Though it may often seem like utter madness, existence in GlimmerGloam usually follows a shadowy framework of twisted logic, giving things just enough reliability to dupe visitors into thinking they know what's coming until the moment when it turns out everything was upside down and inside out all along. Use this world's special un-sanity to turn the tables on confident Gossamer Lords, vexing them with unexpected twists and crushing betrayals, reminding them that the only true illusion is control.

- GlimmerGloam is a "faerie" realm, but one in which every fey has a wicked dark side and the knives really do come out at night. Use GlimmerGloam as an opportunity to showcase the creepy side of the fey, playing up their casual cruelty, mercurial moods, and oft-shifting sanity.

- Perhaps the Rabbit Queen comes to the characters' aid in a miraculous, unexpected fashion while they're out adventuring on the Grand Stair – perhaps decapitating a dire foe out of the blue, or rescuing them from an impossible situation because she just happens to be there looking for her wandering reflection. This unpredictable Gossamer Lady makes for a very odd ally, and sometimes "un-helps" the characters just as much as she helps them, because that's balanced.

- The Rabbit Queen insists that the characters repay their debt to her by helping her loyal subjects finally make her Most Royal S'Posed-to Floating Castle actually float. The characters cannot just do it themselves, otherwise the populace of GlimmerGloam will get all huffy and rebel (in a horrifying bloodbath); the characters must encourage and direct a chaotic crew of treacherous snee, bumbling beastlies, and clumsy trowls to accomplish the architecturally impossible. (All along the Rabbit Queen herself sabotages progress, since the only thing she can imagine more annoying than perpetual arguing and construction is finding her subjects a new project to do.)

- The fleeting reflection of a red-head wrapped in crimson appears to the characters in mirrors and reflections across a multitude of worlds, littering their path with illusions of bloody foxes, dead rabbits, and the echo of an eerie rhyme. Eventually the trail leads to GlimmerGloam, where this reflected specter manifests in the sheen of a dead man's eye, begging the characters to uncover the story of her murder and punish the culprit – her wicked sister, the Rabbit Queen.

- Long ago, a rogue Dwimmerlaik wizard was interred in the Cairn Cottage, and in order to recover a powerful relic the characters must delve deep into the sunken crypt, answer a series of insane riddles, and brave the hauntings of innumerable fey-dead. To make matters worse, the BungleCat has taken an interest in the mission and delights at misinforming, misleading, and mis-fortuning them at every turn. Only once the characters reach the darkest catacomb and recover the dangerous relic do they realize the BungleCat was right to try and stop them.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Hollow Thune

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

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> "Heading back down the invisible hallway, I traced my fingers along the invisible wall to my right and tread cautiously, just in case the invisible floor actually did open up into the infinite black void below. As I took another step I felt the wall corner ninety degrees to the right – an intersection – and rather than take my chances striding forward into nothingness without guidance, I followed the turn. After several dozen steps I came upon a solitary slab of dull grey rock, like a tombstone hanging lonely in the darkness. The Door's knob had rotted away, and in its place there was nothing but a sucking, hissing, fist-sized pit of Shadow."
>
> **- Yaeger's Travelogue**

Thune is dead. Hollow Thune is all that remains.

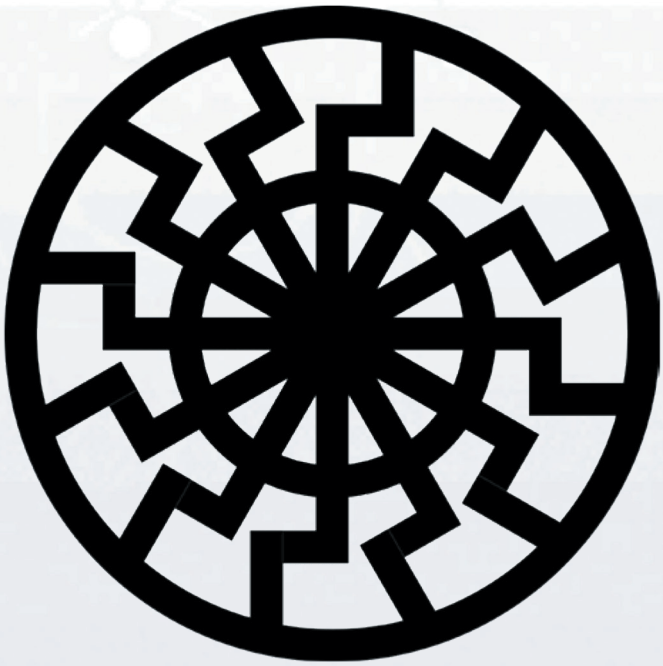
Millennia ago, the planet Thune was a thriving civilization composed of two divergent yet complementary humanoid races: the stoic, industrious dver-guh and the passionate, artistic ylf-mor. While their relationship had its ups and downs, the yin and yang of the dver-guh and ylf-mor modeled a healthy balance between Eidolon and Umbra, and both races had so far progressed side-by-side into a modern age filled with machinery, trade, inspiration, and culture. That is, until the dver-guh discovered vril.

Vril was (is) an aethereal fluid on the edge of cognizable science, which highly educated mystical types would say is a raw form of psychic-responsive magical energy with an Eidolon-attuned polarity. I only mostly understand that. Whatever vril is, it is *incredibly* potent stuff, capable of fueling rockets, eradicating cities, and radically restructuring minds and bodies. A little goes a long, long way.

Dver-guh leaders heralded vril as the key to the "Master Plan" for the ascension of the dver-guh race, and dver-guh scientists immediately began exploiting vril to advance their technology leaps and bounds beyond mere flying machines and electric brains. Industries boomed, cities roared, and fleets of experimental vehicles filled the skies. The more naturalistic and liberal ylf-mor protested but kept their distance, wary of vril's power and the fervor of the possessive dver-guh, until the fateful day when an ylf-mor dabbler dared to harness vril, using its power to transform a dver-guh factory into a blooming forest with a single thought. Though the incident was immediately covered up, the damage was done; to the dver-guh the ylf-mor were no longer merely unwelcome competition, they were an abomination to the so-called Master Plan. The wound to the dver-guh's pride swiftly became infected, their distrust flare into hatred, and their ambition became monstrosity. And so, whispering at map tables and scheming behind the veil of technological progress, the dver-guh thought up the unthinkable and set about doing it. The ylf-mor soon found themselves alienated by propaganda, systematically excluded from every aspect of society, then uprooted from their homes and forced into ghettos or far-off relocation territories. When it came, the blitzkrieg was swift and merciless; dver-guh tanks and bombers wielding the catastrophic power of vril annihilated every ylf-mor settlement on the planet, and in less than a year an entire race was reduced to ashes.

It wasn't a fight. It was genocide.

The hollowing-out of Thune began during the war. At first, dver-guh mines bored deep into the planet, searching out metals for construction of the war-machine and rare minerals for fringe science. Then they built elaborate bunker-cities, fearful of ylf-mor retribution, should the power of vril be turned against them. Towards the end, when chemical attacks, bombs, and ecological disasters had rendered much of the surface uninhabitable, the dver-guh drew their civilization underground, carving out vast air-filled caverns and hidden reservoirs far beneath the blasted landscape. Down there in the dark the dver-guh engaged in horrific experiments with vril, evolving their bodies, unlocking psychic powers, and infusing every fiber of their beings with dangerous concentrations of the stuff – evolutions they touted as predestined by the Master Plan and revelatory of their place as the superior race of Thune – the "vril-guh".



At the zenith of their self-obsessed ascendancy, the dver-guh unleashed a devil even worse than themselves and lost it all. The Master Plan foretold of an ultimate revelation buried deep within Thune, a "Black Sun" which the dver-guh idolized, believing it would unlock the final secrets of vril and guarantee their eternal domination. Desperately they dug, hollowing out still more of the planet, going so far as to quench the furnace of the molten planetary core so they could reach the dark jewel suspended at Thune's center. Surviving accounts described the Black Sun as an obsidian sphere the size of a mountain; the dver-guh thought it was a treasure chest – turns out it was a prison cell which they really shouldn't have opened.

I don't normally pass moral judgment on the denizens of Gossamer worlds – the multiverse is a complicated place – but I'll just say that, after their atrocities, the dver-guh deserved everything they got.

Erebi – horrific monsters of pure Shadow, capable of annihilating gossamer reality with the merest touch – erupted from their ancient, ancient Dwimmerlaik cell, consuming the assembled dver-guh and vril-guh in an instant. Boiling outwards from the center of Thune, hungry and angry, these apocalyptic Shadow-things consumed surrounding matter in great gulps, boring through everything in their path like insane super-worms chewing up a rotten apple. Most of the dver-guh were eradicated in short order, and only the intercession of vril-guh super-scientists kept Thune from disintegrating into the void of Shadow right then and there.

Mustering every ounce of power they could, the vril-guh erected the crystal pillars – over a thousand massive matter-stabilizing vril-reactors infused with the power of the Eidolon – which preserved the structure of now-hollow Thune and forced the rampaging Erebi to retreat to the surface and beyond.

The crystal pillars bought Thune a millennia of partial respite from the ravages of Shadow, but the world is still ruined and gets worse every day. It is, essentially, a tomb. The planetary core is a cold hollow, gravity is sketchy, the atmosphere is thin, and the only thing holding the remaining rock in place are the crystal pillars which serve as a focus for the last-ditch efforts of the flagging Eidolon. Abandoned bunkers and cavern-cities dot the innards of Thune, though the pumps and generators have all failed and the infrastructure of old is long defunct. The dead vastly outnumber the living. Even if someone were to brave the Shadow-infested surface to gaze up at the stars, they wouldn't see any – they're all gone, as is Thune's sun. The sun being eaten happened fairly recently, but temperatures on the surface are already frigid and getting colder every day. Every other material object in this gossamer reality beyond Thune itself has been torn away, disintegrated and nullified by the infinite void of Shadow. As if all that weren't bad enough, an Erebus in the form of a super-colossal ouroboros has swallowed the planet, intent on consuming stubborn Thune from the outside working in, periodically sending enormous Shadow-worms into the interior as digestive aids. Times are tough.

Nowadays, all habitation in Hollow Thune occurs within the cavernous and tunnel-riddled bowels of the planet, trapped between the war-blasted, Shadow-infested surface and the haunting inner core. While the planet is indeed hollow, the remaining crust and rocky mantle are still at least a hundred miles thick in most places, so there's still plenty of room for massive caves and tunnel systems. Interior spaces tend to come in three varieties – natural caves, dver-

guh structures (such as mines, bunkers, and cavern-cities), and Shadow-holes (tunnels and voids resulting from the Erebi consumption of gossamer matter during their deep through the planet). Despite being a large open space, the innermost core of Thune is dark and desolate – a spherical void stripped of all life and dominated by the presence of the ominous Black Sun, which hovers silently at the center of everything like an unblinking obsidian eye of doom.

And so, reeling from the atrocities of genocidal global war, trapped inside the crumbling shell of a dead world, hopelessly besieged by a merciless horde of reality-nullifying alien horrors, somehow... impossibly... life goes on.

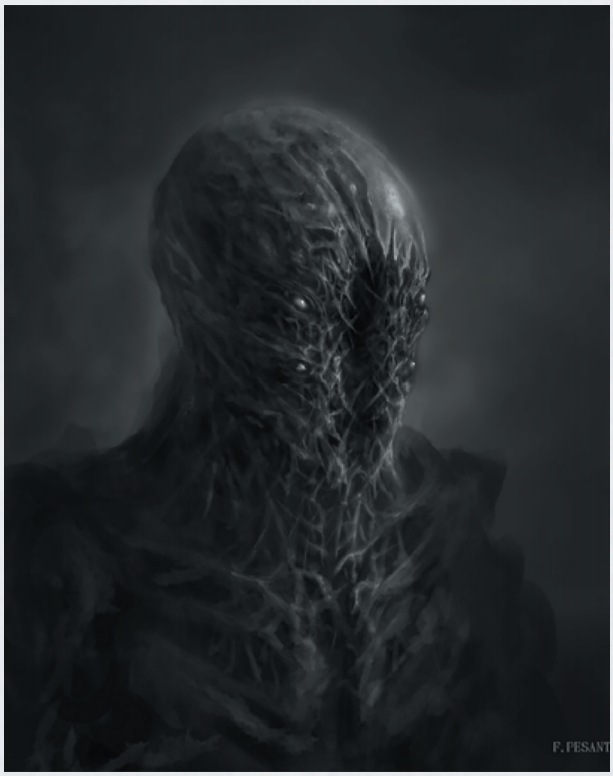
Typical Denizens

Morlocks are the subterranean descendants of the precious few ylf-mor who escaped slaughter at the hands of the dver-guh by hiding themselves deep underground. The ylf-mor embraced the necessity of change in the finer spirit of the Umbra, accepting the vicissitudes of mutation and adaptation borne out through generations spent scrabbling in the dark. Whereas the ylf-mor were willowy, elfin creatures with graceful bodies and skin speckled with patternless flecks of black and white, morlocks are slouched, near-blind, ape-like creatures with pebbled hides and translucent flesh. Adult morlocks are under five feet tall and weigh less than a hundred pounds, though oftentimes they seem even smaller due to their slouching and their tactic of drawing themselves in, still as a rock, as a means of stealth when evading seismically-sensitive predators.

Generations spent underground in the most desperate conditions have taken a toll on morlock intellect and culture, but they remain a spiritual and artistic people, capable of moving poetry and profound oral histories "spoken" in their silent tactile language of hand gestures, tappings, and body movements. A morlock group expressing themselves resembles a furtive grope-fest of twitching, patting, and pawing – a terribly creepy thing to be in the midst of, if you don't understand their intentions. Their cave paintings and murals are exquisite, once you realize that their true medium is texture, not color, and what might appear to be a pock-marked wall contains the equivalent of soaring prose wrought in morlock-Braille.

Technologically, the morlocks are primitive spear-wielding cave-people, focused entirely on base survival – cultivating fungi, hunting subterranean beasts, and evading nullification by Shadow – though canny elders amongst them have figured out how to operate old machinery and fire ancient weapons every once in a while. Exemplifying the tenacity and adaptability of their patron Umbra, the morlocks are a fecund race who have refused to die; since the eruption of the Erebi and the fall of the dver-guh their numbers have grown into the low millions, scattered in diverse, autonomous tribes throughout thousands of warrens. While morlocks usually prefer to reside in natural cave systems, more adventuresome tribes have moved into the ruins of the fallen dver-guh, filling defunct bunkers with blooming fungal gardens and covering the cavern-cities with mural-sagas depicting their traumatic past... and hopes for a future.

The dver-guh died out as a race shortly after the opening of the Black Sun, either consumed directly by the void of Shadow or perishing in the rampant chaos, explosions, and collapses which accompanied the fall of their empire. While several underground dver-guh cities remain as moldering ruins, the last of the dver-guh



perished once the superior vril-guh determined that 'the precursor genetic stock' no longer held any tactical, intellectual, or individual value. Rumors persist that somewhere on Thune there is a heavily shielded bunker inhabited by the last of the dver-guh high commanders – some twisted diminutive freak who has haphazardly extended his life span with infusions of vril, surrounded by animatronic servants who help him pretend the Master Plan is still going well.

The vril-guh are all that remains of the vaunted dver-guh empire – eerie, eldritch übermensch standing as bitter reminders of what the dver-guh spoiled and sacrificed an entire world to become. They're also creepy, narcissistic, racist super-jerks. Whereas the dwarfish dver-guh were on the short and stocky side, vril-guh are statuesque, looming at around eight feet tall with glowing white eyes and flawless grey skin like polished granite, pressed and dressed in immaculate officers uniforms left over from the defunct dver-guh military. The hundred or so surviving vril-guh live in isolated, self-imposed hermitage, jealously maintaining the Eidolon-infused crystal pillars which hold Thune together. While this may seem admirable, the vril-guh don't do it out of altruism or duty – the pillars are the last remaining collection points for precious vril these days, and the vril-guh would be content to let the world crumble if only they could be the last ones standing and be assured their fix. Possessing far more intelligence than morality, the vril-guh apply their sinister intellects to black science, researching arcane methods to dispel the marauding Shadow, or simply experimenting on hapless morlocks to sate their masochism and pass the time.

Threats

Erebi are things of Shadow – that utterly dark and limitless void hanging between the myriad Gossamer worlds. Note that I didn't say 'creatures of Shadow', because Erebi aren't creatures. They aren't alive, or undead, or mechanical – they're

just walking *tears* in existence, sometimes surrounded by something you can actually look at, but oftentimes not. Some appear as clusters of miniature black holes, others as worm-like tunnelings through gossamer reality, and a rare few as half-eaten beings wearing only mocking tatters of substance like some sort of sick joke. In Hollow Thune, gigantic Shadow-worms are fairly common, writhing down into the planet on occasion, effortlessly burrowing through rock as they probe for weaknesses in the protective fields of the crystal pillars and hunt for life forms to eradicate. They're horrifying, and they've already won. As things stand, the Erebi have surrounded and infested Thune, and it is only a matter of time before they consume Thune utterly.

The Faceless Man is an Erebus – one of those few incredibly rare Erebi which manifests itself in gossamer reality in individualized humanoid form. It commonly appears as a tall, grey-skinned vril-guh dressed in the military uniform of a dver-guh high commander, with its face and chest cavity eaten away with Shadow-rot and nothing but a dark abyss glimpsed inside the hollow bipedal shell. I suspect the guise is deliberately chosen to aggravate the inhabitants of Hollow Thune, terrifying the morlocks and mocking the vril-guh. While I sincerely doubt that the Faceless Man is the leader of the Erebi in any sense we might understand, it does seem to be a figurehead for their activities on Thune.

Erebi come in many forms – or lack of form – and have the following qualities:

- Nullify Gossamer Reality [8 Points] – Unlike the Umbra, which warps or weakens reality, the presence of Erebi is actually destructive to gossamer reality, pulling it into the void of Shadow.
- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Destructive Damage [8 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]

The Faceless Man *was* the first dark figure to emerge from the ancient Dwimmerlaik prison known as the Black Sun back on that doomed day when the dver-guh opened the sphere. While the other Erebi busy themselves marauding and digesting the planet, it seems the Faceless Man's role is to torment the cloistered vril-guh who maintain the crystal pillars which have thus far prevented the forces of Shadow from annihilating everything – perhaps a form of psychological warfare where direct assault has stalled. Nobody has ever heard the Faceless Man speak, but there are stories of people going insane in the Man's presence, then acting upon some irresistible compulsion, then keeling over dead, which I suppose may be the closest thing the Erebi have to 'communication'.

Khul-Morghus is an Umbra Gaunt – a bodiless spirit of the Umbra which inhabits a dead creature. In this instance, the dead creature in question is the skeleton of the very last ylf-mor to perish in the dver-guh genocide; there's a lot of power in a corpse like that. If there is a hero left in Hollow Thune, Khul-Morghus is it. This skeletal champion is the realm's most effective individual warrior against the forces of Shadow, possessing an enchanted glaive which repels Erebi and can banish them back to Shadow with a solid hit. More importantly, the Umbra has imbued Khuls Morghus with an awareness of the Grand Stair, and the skeleton has, on occasion, left its home for brief periods in order to seek aid from other walkers of the Grand Stair as an unlikely but determined emissary of a doomed world.

A Visage of Shadow

The Faceless Man has all the qualities of a standard Erebus, plus the Shadow-based equivalent of the following Sorcery spells: Mind Touch, Death, Weaken, Magic Drain, Bolt, and Teleport. While the Man is still a mindless manifestation of the incomprehensible void, for purposes of Psyche challenges consider it to have a Psyche rank of 85. If the Faceless Man is ever destroyed in battle, a new, similar Faceless Man re-emerges from Shadow within a week.

Khul-Morghus has the standard qualities of an Umbra Gaunt.

Mobility [1 Point]
Linked to the Umbra [2 Points]
Double Vitality [2 Points]
Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
Able to Speak in Tongues and Voices [4 Points]
Psychic Neutral [2 Points]
Follow Path [2 Points]

Nimbus, Khul-Morghus' Glaive [25 Points] – steeped in the power of the Umbra, this wicked polearm constantly surrounds its user with a cloudy, glowing haze of entropic matter and energy – the umbral haze has a scrambling effect on surrounding reality, but also rushes to fill any vacuum caused by the utter void of Shadow as if staunching a wound.

Confers Umbra Mastery on User [10 Points]

Deadly Damage [4 Points]

"Limited" Impervious to Harm [4 Points] – *Nimbus* and its user are resistant to the reality-nullifying touch of Shadow; this resistance is not absolute, but it is enough to withstand direct confrontation with most Erebi.

Confers "Limited" Impervious to Harm on User [5 Points]

Linked to the Umbra [2 Points] – *Nimbus* is the Umbra's weapon, so if its user is permanently destroyed the Umbra will find another champion, or create one in the form of a new Umbra Gaunt.

Vril-guh are amoral supermen – frighteningly callous beings with post-mortal abilities such as telepathy, super-strength, and x-ray vision. They're super-intelligent as well, though they misapply their intelligence as evil schemers and mad scientists. Vril is insanely power, and some vril-guh still possess functional vril staffs – silver cylinders a few feet in length which project beams of devastating force more than capable of punching holes through mountains or leveling cities if turned up to their highest setting. The hateful vril-guh have no compunctions against killing people who annoy them or defending their lairs with lethal force, however they don't want to waste a single drop of vril if they can help it, so they usually try to drive off threats through bullying or conventional weapons before expending precious resources. Vril-guh bunkers are surrounded by insidious traps such as collapsing tunnels, radioactive caverns, poison gas chambers, razor-wire snares, and even robotic sentries armed with flame throwers and machine guns left over from the last great war.

Notable Locations

Agartha, located fifty miles beneath what used to be Thune's magnetic north pole, is the largest of the extant dver-guh underground cavern-cities, once holding over a million souls in its stalactite under-towers and stone-hewn townhouses, but now existing as but a husk of its former glory. Architectural highlights of the city include a still-volatile munitions factory, a mud-clogged hydro-electric plant, and a rusty ironworks connected to an expansive labyrinth of ore mines. Presently, a growing tribe of morlocks has occupied the city, cultivating phosphorescent molds along the abandoned avenues and fishing blind eels from crumbling aqueducts. The morlocks have covered the buildings of the central plaza with an epic tactile mural, telling a remarkably complete saga of the great death of the ylf-mor, the doom of Shadow,

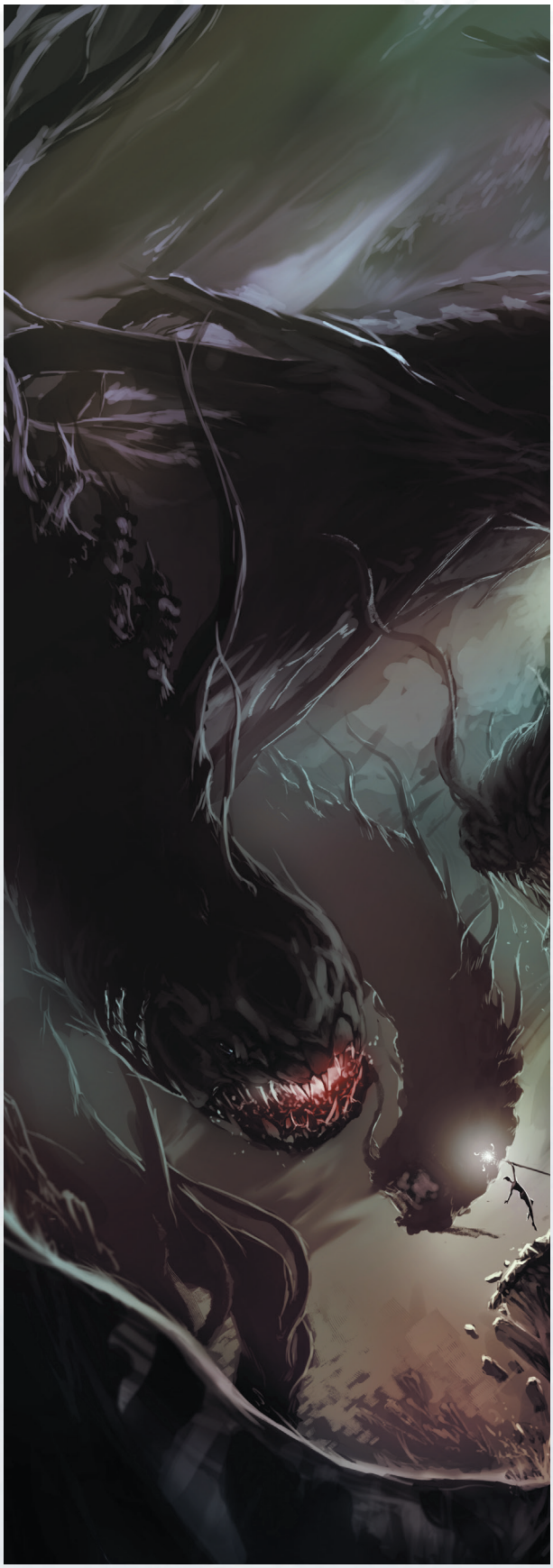
and the constant terrors of the present darkness. The Door to Hollow Thune lies in the center of Agartha, opening into a plush banquet hall which once catered to dver-guh officers. Tattered red banners and shattered flatware still display the twelve crooked spokes of the Black Sun emblem – a symbol that was once the rallying sign of an empire, yet became the epitaph for an entire world.

Vril-guh have the following qualities:

- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Deadly Damage [4 Points] – when using a vril staff
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
- Psychic Neutral [2 Points]
- Self Healing [1 Point]

The Power of Vril: While the average vril-guh possesses the equivalent of Paragon-ranked Attributes, a vril-guh can temporarily increase its Strength or Psyche Attribute to a ranking on the low end or middle of the Attribute Ladder by harnessing the power of vril (as might be drawn directly from the inner workings of a crystal pillar). Such exertions are extremely taxing on the vril-guh's body and mind, potentially fatal, and any expenditure of vril necessarily entails drawing upon the strength of the Eidolon, which will have a catastrophic destabilizing effect on local gossamer reality. (See Scarce Eidolon, below).

The core of Hollow Thune is a cold and haunting place, hollow both in a physical sense and a spiritual one, as nowhere else is the foreboding menace of imminent, inevitable death so soul-crushingly palpable. Nothing lives in the core – no morlocks, no mushrooms, no nothing. On the inner curvature of the core, the Black Sun hangs lightless in the "sky" – a featureless obsidian sphere the size of a mountain, suspended at very center of the planet. Creatures of Shadow still scurry back and forth from the Black Sun like ghostly rats, attending to the inscrutable whims



of the Faceless Man, who seems to be tinkering with the ancient Dwimmerlaik artifact with a determined purpose. In case the hairs on the back of your neck did not already clue you in – that's terrifying. The skeleton Khul-Morghus has a horribly depressing theory that the Faceless Man is attempting to *invert* the dimension-warping technology of the Black Sun, twisting what used to be a containment field for Shadow into an amplifying aperture (as in, a doorway) which would permit the entire engulfing void of Shadow to flood into a gossamer reality without restraint and nullify it in an instant. Scary stuff.

Festung Thuna is a massive fortress – one of the last structures remaining on the surface of Thune, looming on a craggy cliff overlooking a barren plain of dust that used to be an equatorial sea. Designed and built by the dver-guh during the apex of their military build-up in preparation for a ylf-mor counter-attack which never materialized, the installation is incredibly secure and supremely armored, which has allowed it to withstand the ravages of Shadow which have otherwise stripped the planetary surface of every other building and distinguishing landmark. However, thick walls alone can't possibly explain why it still exists, and according to Lucien there's a very dangerous rumor going about as to why: supposedly Festung Thuna is now a Dwimmerlaik outpost, housing a handful of arcanists and summoners intent on using the unique opportunity of Thune's doom as a front row seat to study the Erebi and all things Shadow. Speculation runs rampant about what the Dwimmerlaik's relationship, if any, is with the Faceless Man, and what they intend to do about the Black Sun device before their own technology is turned against them.

Final Thoughts

Hollow Thune is probably one of the worst, most hopeless, most dangerous Gossamer worlds I've ever visited. That's a damn shame, because my intuition tells me that somebody's going to have to go there in order to save the multiverse one day soon. So you might as well gird up and take a tour... just bring a flashlight.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Primitive (long-defunct Electric)
Magic Level:	Known and Believed
Security:	Guarded [4 Points] (by the Erebi)
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: The Faceless Man
Control:	None
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Weak* Umbra – Average Wrighting – Blocked
*Special:	Scarce Eidolon: Thune has been swallowed by an Erebus in the form of a super-colossal ouroboros, and the bolstering of the Eidolon is the only force preventing the planet from being digested and utterly nullified in the void of Shadow. Any evocation of the Eidolon which draws upon its strength risks destabilizing local gossamer reality, triggering cave-ins, collapses, implosions, or calling the attention of the Erebi to a critical weak spot.

How to Use Hollow Thune

- Hollow Thune is a doomed world – a place of darkness, depression, and despair. It is not a nice place, nor is it supposed to be. Use Hollow Thune as an example of the horrors the multiverse has to offer, and a cautionary tale for any who think their own existences couldn't get worse. On the other hand, Hollow Thune offers an opportunity to show how the faintest glimmer of hope can still exist in the most terrible of circumstances. This world asks us: Give up, or don't?

- Hollow Thune is a perfect and terrible place to which to be banished. Perhaps the characters offend the wrong Master of the Grand Stair and are shunted to this Gossamer world, with all viable Doors severed and all avenues of escape frustrated. Cue a wretched ordeal of evading marauding Erebi, dealing with treacherous vril-guh, and avoiding the hungry void of Shadow.

- The Erebi known as the Faceless Man is trying to reverse-engineer the Dwimmerlaik technology of the Black Sun device, inverting it so that it can act as an open doorway to a Gossamer world and permit the void of Shadow to flood in and consume *everything*. This terrible task is nearly complete, and only the characters can stop the Faceless Man from taking the next step and transporting that apocalyptic technology onto the Grand Stair, where it might consume all.

- The characters are in need of an essential bit of information, and it turns out that the last person to know this important secret died and was buried in the depths of Hollow Thune hundreds of years ago. However, before her death this traveler told the secret to the curious morlocks huddled around her; the morlocks in turn recorded the mysterious visitor's story on the cavern walls in their unique form of tactile writing. So, in order to recover the lost information, the characters must go spelunking deep into the morlock warrens, feeling their way along the walls.

- Be conscientious with the metaphors and symbolism of Hollow Thune. Genocide, racial violence, and the atrocities of power are real evils, with real history. Use Hollow Thune as a means of grappling with horrors almost too big to comprehend, but don't regard them lightly.

- Vril is an obscenely powerful substance, and the Dwimmerlaik may have discovered a means by which vril can be extracted and transported at full potency across the Grand Stair to other Gossamer worlds. This is a very bad thing, and other Gossamer Lords insist that Hollow Thune must be allowed to crumble into Shadow in order to choke off the flow of vril at its source. The characters are asked to destroy the crystal pillars which are all that hold the planet upright – sacrificing this world and its inhabitants to save others. Will they, or is there another way?

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Dragonhearth

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Dragonhearth

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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"The invisible staircase descended from the darkened void above, winding down in a lazy gyre which made me feel like a raptor circling prey. Eventually I alighted upon a landing before an open archway spilling over with warm orange light. The room beyond was small and circular, like the top of a tower, wrought in gleaming brass and lit by spigots of flame which protruded from the walls. The atmosphere felt like a sauna, or the inside of a boiling kettle, and a brush of my hand confirmed the burnished walls to be scalding hot. In the room was a single Door made of solid gold set with gemstones, its frame inlaid with twisting serpentine spines and its spiky golden knob worked in the shape of a snarling dragon's head."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

Dragonhearth is a world of dragons.

I don't mean that Dragonhearth is a world in which you can find dragons, though you absolutely can. I don't mean that it is a place ruled by dragons, though it absolutely is. What I mean is that Dragonhearth is an entire world where the very fabric of gossamer reality *is* dragon-stuff, from the serpentine wavelengths of light propagating through space, to the myriad draconic life forms inhabiting the realm, to the ancient wyrms whose living breath forms the clouds and whose bodies make up the verybedrock of the mountains. The entire realm is dragons, dragons, dragons, everywhere and in every*thing*, and it is truly marvelous.

Also dangerous – did I mention exceedingly dangerous?

Life is abundant and aggressive in Dragonhearth. Much of the terrain is mountainous, with stony spires and daunting cliffs providing roosts and perches for the screeching, soaring multitudes of dragonkind. Towering forests fill the valleys between the highlands, and in the warmer regions there are dark jungles and sucking swamps teeming with exotic draconic flora and fauna. There are extreme regions – icy wastes of flesh-freezing cold and volcano-fields sweltering in blood-boiling heat – but in a world where breathing blasts of the raw elements is as common as regular breathing, there's no shortage of perfectly-adapted beasts filling every ecological niche. Even the plants are vicious – I once almost got a finger bitten off by a lovely-smelling but too-literal snapdragon. Species roles tend overwhelmingly toward the predatory, with greater predators preying upon their lesser cousins all the way up the food chain; only the eldest of the ancient wyrms dare to boast the title of 'apex predator' in this savage land, and even the eldest have reason to fear the combined might of the younger dragons.

The struggle of young versus old is an eternal conflict in Dragonhearth. The eldest dragons have life spans measurable by epochs, so they have a terrifying capacity to soak up and hoard power over time. Every so often a cabal of middle-aged dragons tries to take out some of the older generation; in this you can see the influence of the Umbra, doing what entropy does

by nudging crystalized accumulations of energy back toward dispersion and disorder. Every so often the usurpers win and the power of the elders disperses, but more often than not these generational coups fail catastrophically, resulting in massacres which only serve to widen the gap between the incumbent elder dragons and the next tier of would-be rivals.

Reincarnation is a fact of spiritual existence in Dragonhearth. Dragons have souls, and those souls respect a karmic hierarchy where meritorious living earns incarnation as a higher species of draconic creature in the next life. 'Meritorious living' in this context means being being the best and strongest and most cunning dragon one can be, without any soft-skin nonsense about being kind or generous or forgiving people. The dragons believe their treasure hoards have spiritual value in these end-of-life karmic calculations, which explains their covetous tendencies and willingness to defend a giant pile of jewels even in the face of certain death. Through reincarnation a draconic soul might climb the rungs from a small feathered serpent to a wyvern, then to a majestic red dragon, only to tumble down to the level of a lowly fire-eel if their fortunes fail. A draconic soul may retain important memories or strong affinities from one life to the next, and it is not uncommon for a soul to keep the same friends and enemies from life to life.

Metamorphosis is a common biological characteristic of the dragons of Dragonhearth, so a draconic soul need not wait for death and rebirth in order to change. Some metamorphoses are gradual, with dragons changing incrementally during the process of molting their skins or during growth spurts following a gorging feast. Some metamorphoses are radical, like the caterpillar transforming into the butterfly, with the dragon entombing itself in a hard chrysalis or silky cocoon for anywhere from a month to millennia, then emerging with substantial upgrades. Metamorphosis can also be devolutionary, with dragons hibernating after a humiliating defeat only to crawl back out as something lesser than before.

All dragons belong to both the Eidolon and the Umbra, waxing and waning between stronger and weaker phases of affinity for either throughout the course of their existence. These shifts and phases usually coincide with the vicissitudes of

the draconic soul's cycle of metamorphosis and reincarnation; so while an acid-spewing drake might be chaotic and destructive in a waxing Umbra phase, in its next incarnation the influence of the Umbra wanes as the drake becomes a grumpy basilisk, eventually transforming into a disciplined crystal wyrm in some later waxing-Eidolon phase. This constant churning between the two cosmic forces produces a great deal of magical friction, and is one of the reasons dragons are so mystically powerful. This ever-moving but roughly balanced juxtaposition of the Eidolon and Umbra has held for eons, and until quite recently Dragonhearth was a healthy example of cosmic balance.

Then came the machines.

A few years ago, the golden dragon Khemezatron – a Warden of the Grand Stair and explorer of the multiverse – returned home to Dragonhearth after a long sojourn, bringing with her a psychotechnic virus from an alien world where psychic communication had converged

with computer science at the bleeding edge of nanotechnology. Hardly an innocent or unwitting carrier, Khemezatron returned with specific aims to conquer her homeland and her fellow dragons with the insidious aid of the alien virus. Nowadays, half-cyborg dragons infected with the psychotechnic virus are constantly on the prowl, seeking out other dragons to overpower and subject to infection and Khemezatron's mental control. The battle for the souls of Dragonhearth has begun.

Dragonbonds

The dragonbond is an intense psychic, spiritual, and mystical connection between a dragon and any other living being – another dragon, a humanoid, or even some lesser creature. The two parties to a dragonbond are referred to as 'dragonmates', though only one of them need be a dragon. The emotional character of the relationship between dragonmates can vary greatly; a powerful dragon might loom as tyrannical master over a submissive thrall, a partnered pair of dragons may be soul-entwined lovers, or a dragon and its non-dragon companion may share an unbreakable bond of friendship and mutual respect.

The formation of a dragonbond is always a unique and personal story, varying wildly in the amount of time, effort, and contact required. Bonds can be formed through sleepless weeks of intense ritual and spiritual communion, or instantly as two souls reach out for each other as destiny intended. Some elder dragons possess psyches so powerful they can force the dragonbond upon any creature who meets their gaze.

Dragonbonds are tenacious and long-lasting. Breaking a bond is always difficult and traumatic, usually requiring a combination of psychic surgery and the use of a Power, such as a specific Sorcery ritual or creative use of Invocation to detangle the dragonmates' True Names. Death alone will not break a dragonbond, and it *is* possible for a creature to remain bound to a corpse. It is not uncommon for dragonmates remain bonded through reincarnation and resurrection, twining together in an endless cycle of shared lifetimes.

Dragonbonds are either weak or strong. A creature may sustain multiple dragonbonds, both weak and strong, between multiple different dragonmates, though typically a creature's capacity for multiple bonds is a function of its age and power. Lesser creatures can hold only a

single bond, whereas ancient dragons can hold entire ecosystems in their sway.

A weak dragonbond allows dragon-mates to communicate empathically over short distances (typically no further than one mile), feeling each other's emotions and exchanging basic ideas such as 'attack', 'hunt', 'flee', 'help me', etc. Simple directions can be given and obeyed, though each dragonmate ultimately retains its free will to choose its actions.

A strong dragonbond grants all the benefits of a weak bond, and also allows dragonmates to communicate telepath-ically, share senses and memories, and instinctively locate each other. If either dragonmate has the power to access the Grand Stair, both can sense and pursue each other across realities via *Attunement to the Grand Stair:* Search Through Worlds. Also, dragonmates with a strong bond can share Powers easily, with uses such as gaining simultaneous benefit from protective effects, casting Sorcery spells through each other, or joining their strength when invoking the Eidolon or Umbra. The intense connection of a strong dragonbond has its drawbacks. One dragonmate in a strong dragonbond can attempt to impose its will upon the other dragonmate by defeating it in a challenge of Psyche, giving suggestions the force of command. Also, dragonmates in a strong bond feel each other's mental and physical pain to some degree, though a creature may use its Endurance to endure such discomfort without being overwhelmed.

Typical Denizens

There are a *lot* of dragons here, but by now that should be fairly obvious. The number of variations upon the draconic theme cannot easily be counted. There are faerie dragons, feathered serpents, and dragon turtles. There are wyverns, sinuous wingless wyrms, and a prolific assortment of the classic four-legged, two-winged reptiles adorned with myriad assortments of horns, spines, and frills. There are elemental dragons whose bodies are roaring flame or crashing waves, and diffused draconic spirits who drift like ghosts or the blowing wind. Some dragons are labeled based upon the color or physical composition of their scales, but those simplistic and small-minded naming conventions hardly reach a sufficient depth of individual morphological nuance; that said, most people understand that when I yell 'red dragon!' they should run away from the big scary thing which is likely about to incinerate us with its fire breath, so the simple names have a tendency to stick.

In addition to the overwhelming preponderance of 'regular' dragons great and small, there are a number of humanoid draconic races. You could refer to the them as 'dragon-men', but I wouldn't do so to their faces. To wit:

The Quetzali are a race of bipedal wingless feathered serpents with long wispy tails, willow-thin frames, and colorful frills of feathers which conceal their poisonous spines. Found around the stepped pyramids of Dragonhearth's warmer deserts and jungles, the shamanistic

Quetzali are excellent psychics and sorcerers, adept with consciousness-altering venoms and dangerous dream-magic. They are masters of the dragonbond, and can create, strengthen, and sever such bonds through sacred psychic rites passed down and preserved since ancient times.

The Dracon have short-snouted draconic heads atop well-muscled humanoid bodies, with short vestigial tails. Lording over a small empire of medieval technology heavily augmented by spellcraft, the Dracon are proud and bellicose, quick to take offense or seize an advantage. While they have a nagging inferiority complex regarding their status beneath the 'true dragons' of Dragonhearth, they're not to be underestimated; Dracon enchanters equip their arcane knights with ensorcelled weapons and armor the rival of any dragon's scales or claws.

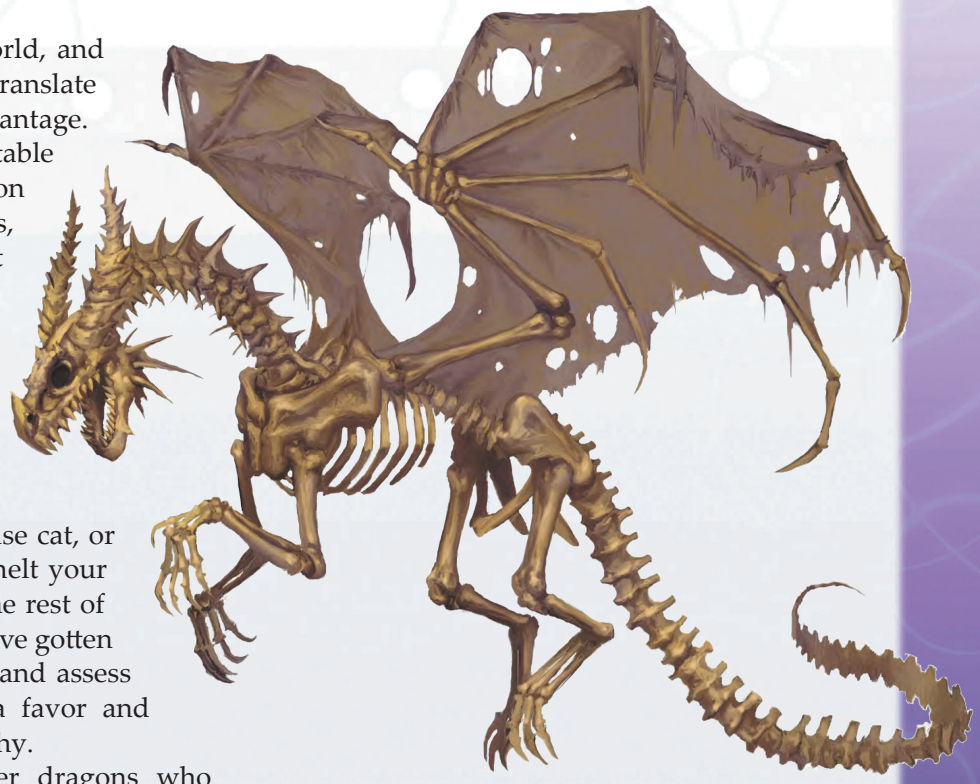
If you visit Dragonhearth, you may also encounter a supposed race of fey-like dragon-kin who call themselves the Faelen Draga, appearing as comely men and maidens with brows kissed by scales and the glint of summer lightning in their teeth. They'll wine and dine you and promise you the secret heart of the kingdom after an evening's passion, but it's all a ruse and a trap. They're nothing but a gang of low-down shapeshifting faerie-dragons intent on robbing blind any gullible humanoid they can find. Charlatans. They're the worst. *Not that I'm bitter or anything.*

Scattered sparsely throughout Dragonhearth are a few non-draconic inhabitants, though all of them are non-natives, transplanted here from another Gossamer world sometime in the recent or distant past. Some of these are refugees, brought here pursuant an inter-dimensional exodus facilitated by a meddling Warden of the Grand Stair, like the tribes of blue elves who dwell in the city-trees of the equatorial jungles, or the isolated villages of humans left over from the ill-fated Fanfomir Expedition. Other non-natives are the minions – or the descendants of minions – of the various Gossamer Lords who have established holdings in the common ground of Dragonhearth over the ages, staffing various castles and fortresses while their masters galavant across the multiverse. Regardless of their origins, these non-natives have an additional challenge in that their non-dragon biologies are treated as unwelcome foreign bodies by the gossamer reality of Dragonhearth; this rejection manifests physically as various wasting diseases referred to generally as 'soft-skin sickness'. Non-natives afflicted with soft-skin sickness can abate the condition by making their bodies or souls more draconic – usually by forming a dragonbond with a native dragon, or by consuming a regular diet of fresh dragon blood. Thus, for the sake of survival (and because it is profoundly awesome), the sacred companionship of dragonbonds are an essential way of life for all the inhabitants of Dragonhearth.

Threats

Dragons are dangerous. If you didn't know that already, you know it now. A foolish Gossamer Lord or Lady might assume that just because dragons are commonplace in this Gossamer world, the common dragon is therefore unremark-able in power and threat. That's a risky assumption. While it is true that the majority of the dragons in Dragonhearth are no real match for we high-and-mighty walkers of the Grand Stair, bear in mind that dragons are the very essence

of this particular Gossamer world, and that inherent synergy can translate into a powerful home field advantage. Also, due to the unpredictable power-dynamics of reincarnation and karmic metamorph-osis, draconic specimens who don't appear at first glance to be the top of food chain might nevertheless possess the power and aptitude of countless lifetimes. So the small ember-drake perched on your shoulder might be the equivalent of a winged house cat, or it might be potent enough to melt your face off if you don't let it eat the rest of your lunch. Unless or until you've gotten to know an individual dragon and assess its power level, do yourself a favor and assume they're all caution-worthy.



Dracoliches are ancient elder dragons who possess such power they have transcended the constraints of mortality, returning to corporeal form in defiance of death time and again. Some dracoliches are undead in the classical necromantic sense – serpentine corpses rising from their graves on skeletal wings wearing only tatters of rotten flesh. Others have attuned themselves to the elements so completely their spirits can reform their bodies from fiery lava or the bedrock of mountains. A few dracoliches reincorp-orate themselves through even stranger means, assembling new bodies from flesh-warped amalgams of their dragonbonded thralls, inhabiting golden simulacra wrought from their vast treasure hoards, or possessing an endless series of arcane clones grown to house their souls for perpetuity. Dracoliches draw upon both the Eidolon and the Umbra; they can sow madness and destruction, but they're also domineering overlords and calculating empire-builders, unwilling to discard their well-established legacies and face the unthinkable prospect of starting anew... or ending. Over time dracoliches collect vast resources, including armies of dragonbonded minions held in thrall by the dracolich's overwhelming psyche. The only saving grace of these ancient wyrms may be their glacial patience, which permits them to sleep away centuries or even millennia in between relatively brief eruptions of activity. Only a few dracoliches stir in the present age; the rest lay dormant. There is terrible potential there, for if even a quarter of Dragonhearth's known dracoliches were roused at the same time, the catastrophes to ensue would surely be apocalyptic.

Khemezatron is an elder dragon who awakened to the existence of the Grand Stair centuries ago and, like so many of us did when presented with the possibilities of an infinite cosmos just beyond the nearest Door, stepped out of her home world to go exploring. When she left Dragonhearth, Khemezatron was already a powerful golden dragon who had mastered the Eidolon as well as the art of Invocation, but her otherworldly travels changed her. On a futuristic Gossamer world where computer science and psychic communications are sides of the same coin, Khemezatron was infected by a psychotechnic virus. The virus transformed her into a being of enlightened psionic circuits – and a devastatingly effective disease vector.

Khemezatron has returned home to Dragonhearth as a messianic mother-conqueror, proselytizing to her fellow dragons that they shouldn't consider this a takeover, but an upgrade.

Deathless Dragons

Dracoliches come in many varieties, each individual a unique and terrifying beast unto itself, but most dracoliches have, at a minimum, the following qualities:

- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Double Speed [2 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Psychic Barrier[4 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Regeneration [4 Points] – which may be suspended at the whim of the dracolich, should it wish to rest for a while in a death-like torpor.
- True Name is Warded [2 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] – an individualized array of potent supernatural abilities, e.g. elemental summoning, necromancy, weather control, one or more of the Powers, etc.

Khemezatron, the Golden Circuit

Attributes

Psyche – 65 Points
Strength – 45 Points
Endurance – 30 Points
Warfare – 25 Points

Powers

Eidolon Mastery [50 Points]
Warden of the Grand Stair [10 Points]
Invocation [20 Points]

Artifacts & Creatures

Technobonded Army [30 Points] – Khemezatron commands a diverse army of cybernetically-modified dragons whose dragonbonds have been replaced by Khemezatron's technobonds, rendering them her obedient slaves.

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Double Damage [2 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- Horde [x3 Points]

Khemezatron's Golden Armor [12 Points] – this shape-shifting suit of golden armor is made of Khemezatron's own scales, bolstered by the strength of the Eidolon and inscribed with the True Names of several creatures or objects into which Khemezatron can transform. The armor has been thoroughly infested and altered by the psychotechnic virus which afflicts Khemezatron, and acts as an infection reservoir to ensure she does not reflexively rid herself of the virus.

- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]
- Self Healing [1 Point]
- Named and Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points]
- Confers Named & Numbered Alternate Forms on Wearer [5 Points] - Seven alternate forms, including a human woman in a golden dress, a gold-plated android, a warhorse with golden barding, a water serpent bound in golden rings, and a black and gold 1982 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am.

Draconis, Khemezatron's Ruby Horn [7 Points] – the ruby horn protruding from Khemezatron's forehead is a powerful psychic amplifier and a focus for her Invocation-based ability to transform dragonbonds into technobonds.

- Connected to Invocation [1 Point]
- Mold Gossamer Creatures [2 Points]
- Confers Mold Gossamer Creatures on Wearer [5 Points] – if *Draconis* were to be destroyed, all of Khemezatron's technobonds would unravel and cease to exist.

Stuff

Bad [+2 Points]

Technobonds vs Dragonbonds

Khemezatron's mastery of the psychotechnic virus allows her to "hack" an existing dragonbond, severing (or at least suppressing) the bond between two dragonmates and inserting herself as one of the parties to the bond. To do so, the victim creature must be exposed to some source of the virus (physical contact with an infected creature is sufficient) and Khemezatron must defeat the victim in psychic combat. If/once Khemezatron is successful, the victim's dragonbonds are all suppressed and replaced by a single 'technobond' binding the victim to Khemezatron as she hijacks the connection of the bond and redirects it to herself. The nature of every technobond is a controlling relationship between master and slave, and Khemezatron may impose her will on her technobonded minions with minimal effort. Khemezatron automatically learns the True Name of any creature she subjects to a technobond, granting her all the appurtenant benefits which come with such intimate and profound knowledge.

A technobonded creature acts robot-ically, experiencing episodes of confusion and fugue while its mind struggles against the psychotechnic virus. Victims gets the shakes and display other physical symptoms of infection as their nervous systems are replaced by circuitry, with metallic contact nodes protruding from their skin and lattices of golden wires replacing their irises.

There is still a residual psychic connection between a technobonded creature and its former dragonmate(s) – a hollow channel filled with awful psychic static and echoing with pangs of loss. A technobonded creature can use this residual connection to attempt to subject its former dragonmates to the technobond via the same method of infection and psychic combat, and by this means the psychotechnic virus can propagate without Khemezatron's direct action, appropriating entire dragonbond net-works as it spreads.

Notable Locations

The Kur is an enormous mountain range which bisects the middle of Dragonhearth's largest central continent, running from north to south in a crest of stony spires and jagged peaks which can be spied in the distance all across the world. The Kur's thousand summits are tall and nearly impossible to traverse on foot, broken up by dark chasms but also protected valleys filled with scaly pines and a wealth of draconic life. In addition to being an unmistakable landmark, Kur is also the largest, oldest, and most powerful dracolich in

all the realm. Slumbering in the ground (*as* the ground) since before the eldest dragons cracked their shells, the ancient elemental dragon has not stirred in ages... though it does dream. Ghostly dream-projections created by Kur's godlike psyche haunt the mountain range, pantomiming echoes of ancient memories and silently watching the goings-on. Much like an elephant staring blankly in the direction of a gnat, Kur doesn't react to much, which is a good thing, since if it ever so much as shifted in its sleep half of Dragonhearth would rip apart at the seams.

The Crystal Cliffs lay far to the northeast of the Kur, looming high above the icy coast of the Sea of Watatsumi's Tears. Thousands of alcoves large and small pock-mark the cliff's sheer vertical face along its expanse, most leading into a vast cave system which riddles the crystalline bedrock and up into the permafrost of the frozen plateau above. The golden dragon Khemezatron dwells here, surrounded by her army of technobonded dragons and cyborg minions. In addition to commanding the minds of its infected inhabitants, the psychotechnic virus has thoroughly transformed the environment as well, turning multiple square miles of the geode-like interior of the cliffs into a massive psychic supercomputer. The entire area is overwhelmingly saturated by the Eidolon, giving Khemezatron a pronounced advantage when invoking the Eidolon against anyone foolish enough to challenge her in her lair.

The Valley of Bones is nestled in the lowlands to the west of the Kur, along a southerly-flowing river which empties into the nearby Daggermaw Fjords. The valley is strewn with the moldering skeletons of hundreds of dragons who fell in battle a century ago during an ill-fated attempt to defeat the mighty storm dragon Shen-lung. In addition to slaughtering every challenger, the spiteful Shen-lung defiled their corpses with a binding curse so the dragons' souls would forever languish in their bones. Tragically, the dragonbonded companions of the cursed dragons are also unable to move on, so the valley is frequented by aging sidekicks – some draconic, some humanoid – forever pining over the remains of their fallen dragonmates. These mournful survivors have formed a small monastic village named Vigil in the skull of one of the larger skeletons, and the Door to Dragonhearth opens up here, into the common room of the village's tavern, where many a glass is raised to memories of winged friends.

Final Thoughts

Dragonhearth is an amazing place, full of bold and majestic dragons who inspire awe and stoke the imagination simply by being. I love this place, and I urge you to visit and see if there's a toothy fire-breathing beast out there who wants to be your soul mate – but don't enter into such ties lightly, for dragons are not the sort of creatures one can afford to spurn. It's too bad the realm is presently suffering from the unbalance of Khemezatron's invading machine infection, but something tells me Dragonhearth won't be tolerating that for long before it brings out the big *big* guns.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Medieval/Other (psychotechnic machine invasion)
Magic Level:	Commonplace
Security:	None
Type:	Common Ground [2 Points] (multiple simultaneous owners, but presently experiencing a power-grab by owner Khemezatron)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to the territory of one's bonded dragons*)
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Average Wrighting – Easily Used
*Special:	*From Dragons, All Things Flow* – The bodies, energies, and influences of dragons are the essential building blocks of gossamer reality in this realm. In order for Gossamer Lords and Ladies to exercise control over a portion of the world as a Domain, that control must be exerted through one or more bonded dragons. The Powers of Eidolon Mastery, Umbra Mastery, and/or Sorcery are half as effective and take twice the effort and time when not channeled through a bonded dragon.

How to Use Dragonhearth

- Dragonhearth is a world of unabashed draconic magnificence, so don't be shy about reveling in the joys that come with studying dragons, riding dragons, and trying not to get eaten by dragons. Trot out your favorite draconic artwork as inspiration and reference, and enjoy basking in the beauty and grandeur of an entire world filled with these bold and brilliant beast-gods.

- Make a dragon a permanent part of your game. Maybe let one of your players play a character who *is* a dragonbonded dragon! Forming a dragonbond isn't about getting a pet, it's about gaining a soulmate – a soulmate that just might breathe lightning and roar thunder. Play up the deep emotional connection between dragonmates as they share highs and lows; then, when the dragonbond is the most important thing in a character's life, threaten to taint that bond and rip their entwined-soul apart with a corrupting attack by the aggressive psychotechnic virus.

- Dragons should be terrifying. Use the dracoliches and greater dragons of Dragonhearth as an opportunity to impress upon even the most powerful of Gossamer Lords the folly of drawing the ire of a great wyrm. Crush them. Burn them. Eat them with ketchup and call it delicious. Perhaps the characters are entreated by the psychedelic shamans of the Quetzali to slay the mad spirit-dracolich Draz-Az-Mictlan before it swallows the entire cycle of reincarnation, or rescue a wounded ally from a death-trap in the unimaginable treasure hoard of the transmuter Auro-Ka.

- The mountainous dracolich Kur has existed since the beginning of time, and recalls more in its fleeting dreams than most Gossamer Lords shall ever know in a hundred lifetimes. The ghostly dream-projections in the Kur mountains hold the key to mysteries from long ago, so perhaps in order to solve an ancient mystery the characters must wander the spires and listen to the ghosts.

- Dragonhearth is an ecosystem under attack by an invasive species, as Khemezatron's psychotechnic virus and infected cyborg minions threaten to overtake all draconic life. Use this situation to highlight the dangers of cross-contamination due to travel between Gossamer worlds. Wouldn't all these worlds be safer and better off without the Grand Stair? Also, use Khemezatron's domineering power-grab as an example of how sometimes the Eidolon is the Power of the "bad guy", as her campaign for control threatens to ruin a land of wild natural beauty.

- The constant battles between old dragons and younger dragons can highlight the war between all ages. Younger dragons ask the characters: don't they resent the older, entrenched, stagnant Gossamer Lords? Maybe they too would like band together and take down the establishment...

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Incursion Earth 626

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Incursion Earth 626

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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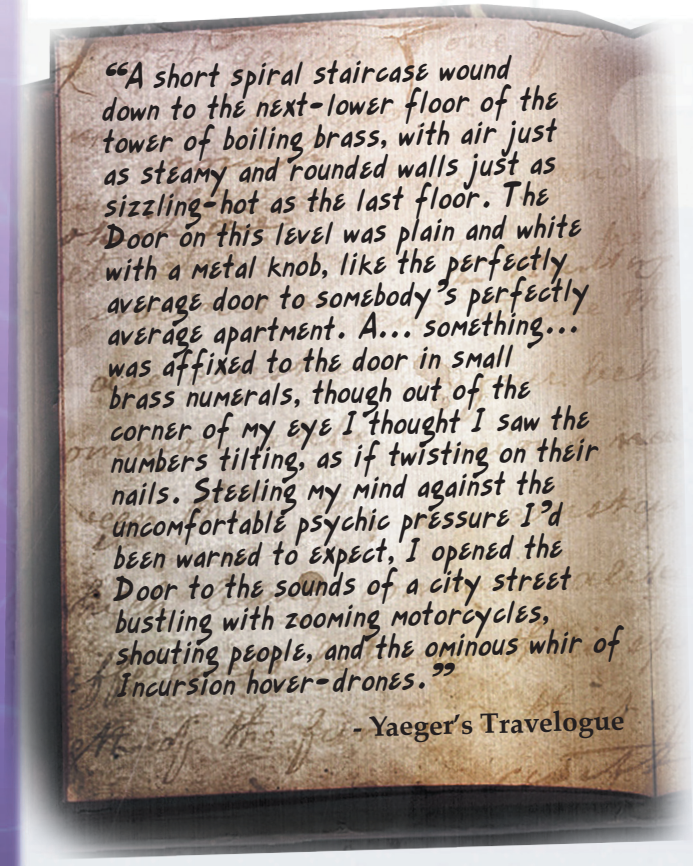

"A short spiral staircase wound down to the next-lower floor of the tower of boiling brass, with air just as steamy and rounded walls just as sizzling-hot as the last floor. The Door on this level was plain and white with a metal knob, like the perfectly average door to somebody's perfectly average apartment. A... something... was affixed to the door in small brass numerals, though out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw the numbers tilting, as if twisting on their nails. Steeling my mind against the uncomfortable psychic pressure I'd been warned to expect, I opened the Door to the sounds of a city street bustling with zooming motorcycles, shouting people, and the ominous whir of Incursion hover-drones."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

Across the multiverse, there are infinite Earths. After traveling the Grand Stair for long enough, you come to recognize these Earth-worlds by their themes and differences, distinguishing them from whichever version you first encountered long ago which set your expectations for what an 'Earth' should be. Maybe World War II has to be won by a particular nation-state for it to feel right, or maybe you're only familiar with the popular timeline up to the 26th century and anything after that seems like some bizarre fever-dream. Personally, I didn't grow up on an Earth and I've never picked a favorite, but I like visiting them in general and I've traipsed up and down the Stair long enough to know where Incursion Earth 626 seems to fit.

Up until about thirty years ago, this Earth was fairly "standard". Then, in their year 1985, reality cracked. It wasn't the humans fault – at least not this time. What happened was this: the pan-dimensional scientific collective known as the Incursion used their hyper-advanced planar tunneling techniques to bore a hole into this Gossamer world from a nearby reality. If you're not familiar with the stories of the legendary Incursion, I'll refer you to Lucien's ostensibly-reliable scholarship on them... but in case you've given up on the old librarian's work in favor of livelier analyses, I can summarize: the Incursion are a vast armada of hyper-intelligent technocratic overlords with holdings across thousands of Gossamer worlds, intent on expanding throughout the multiverse with the patience and inevitability of an invasive species of weed. Weeds with super-science and space marines, that is. The Incursion are neither infinite

nor all-powerful, but they're terribly shrewd and relentlessly methodical, not to mentioned steadfastly determined about their mission of inter-dimensional expansion. And so, about thirty years ago, without warning, these invaders in x-ray-goggles and armored lab-coats pushed the right buttons to tamper with the fabric of the cosmos, forcing open a Door... and breaking something in the process. I have no idea how to explain what exactly they did, or what they thought they were doing – I'm not the scientist, nor am I so well-versed in hoary mystical metaphysics to spout some sorcerous explanation that would probably be equally nonsensical. I highly suspect that the Incursion don't even know what exactly they did or how it happened – because if they did, I reckon they would've done it somewhere else before or somewhere else since and, as far as we know, the psionic event of Incursion Earth 626 remains unique. The 1985 event resulted in an unprecedented upsurge in ambient psychic energies – a veritable flood of raw psionic power suffusing the entire Gossamer world. The world hasn't been the same since, and will never be the same again.

The moment the Incursion broke through (via their ill-made Door onto the surface of Saturn's moon of Titan) and reality cracked, previously average humans found themselves plagued with psychic phenomena – uncontrollable telekinesis and unwanted telepathy, possessions and poltergeists, spooky visions and spiritual violence. The first few years of this catastrophically sudden psychic renaissance were chaotic and traumatic for the people of Earth, as confused, untrained psychics with uncontrolled abilities ravaged their communities – most by accident or out of fear, some on purpose. An entire town in rural Sweden

went insane when a young telepath couldn't help but read and re-broadcast the thoughts of every living being within five miles. New York City nearly burned to the ground as telekinetic psi-actives hurled taxi cabs at SWAT teams and started a firestorm by rupturing every gas main in the Bronx. Switzerland closed its borders and initiated a complete lockdown in hopes of weathering the apparent apocalypse, but when U.N. investigators re-entered the country in 1987 the entire population was dead – every person who hadn't died of a fear-induced heart attack had either committed suicide or been ripped apart by somebody else's bare hands. By 1988 the world governments and a precious few clear-thinking psi-actives developed responses and brought the worst of the situations under control, though everywhere it was a little bit different.

Some cultures made sense of these new troubles through the old lenses of spiritualism and folk-magic, as ancient superstitions suddenly seemed relevant. In many places psi-actives were burned as witches, revered as gods, or both. Several governments – the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, and the still-extant

Soviet Union especially – pounced on opportunity and "enrolled" the more (relatively) tractable psi-actives in rigorous, highly secretive government training programs. Those psi-actives who didn't submit to the yoke of these shadowy government keepers were either killed or driven into hiding.

As if the great psychic upheaval weren't enough to turn the world on its head...

In 1991, the Incursion invaded Earth. The Incursion had taken the previous seven years on Saturn's moon Titan building their fleet of intra-solar spaceships and landers – since (thankfully) not even the Incursion has mastered a convenient way to squeeze a fully-assembled starship through a person-sized Door. The Incursion fleet arrived in terrestrial orbit all at once, instantly crippling Earth's primitive satellite network. The U.S. and U.S.S.R. launched nuclear strikes early on, but the all-too-prepared Incursion effortlessly reprogrammed missile guidance systems with their vastly advanced technological know-how, vaporizing Washington, D.C. and Moscow with their own devices. Orbital landers and swarms of hovercraft descended,

looming ominously above other capital cities as they made a deliberate show of eradicating any and every fighter jet, helicopter, or rocket which left the ground. With humanity shocked and demoralized, gigantic holo-screens lit up over every major city on the globe and the intimidating, helmeted visage of the Incursion strategos told everybody left how it was going to be.

The full story of the invasion and conquering of this Earth is much longer and harrowing than what I'm skimming over now. For the past twenty-five years humanity has been struggling against the Incursion, fighting back when they can and playing possum when they must. Earthlings have always been a terribly tenacious species, and this world is no different.- Yaeger's Travelogue

Psionics vs. Sorcery

In this Gossamer world, psychic power and psionics take the place of magic and sorcery. Visiting Gossamer Lords and Ladies shouldn't lose their hard-won Powers upon stepping through the Door, but some effort should be made to emphasize the dominant paradigm (psionics instead of magic) and encourage characters to use their mojo 'like the locals do'. There are a few different ways to adjudicate this concept, and Game Masters should choose whichever method bests fits their campaign:

- Impromptu Psionics. Run Psionics as per the rules for Impromptu Sorcery (Lords of Gossamer & Shadow, page 45) – psychics draw psychic energy from their surroundings and personal reserves, rapidly and recklessly creating powerful effects; this process is physically and mentally taxing on the psychic (e.g., experiencing headaches, nose bleeds, fainting or worse) and disrupts the surrounding environment (e.g., lights flicker, rooms shake, glass shatters), with greater consequences accompanying greater effects. Standing in place while gathering one's power, screaming names into the swirling winds, is appropriate and highly encouraged.

- Sorcery by any other name. Run Psionics the same as Sorcery, with psychic preparation taking the place of lynchpins, etc., making the difference between largely cosmetic. This approach may maintain the most 'game balance' between Psionics and Sorcery as Powers, but at the expense of psionics' inherent danger and spontaneity.

- Apples and oranges, fast and loose. Run Psionics and Sorcery as two entirely different disciplines. Characters with Sorcery just have to deal with a world where their psychic opponents produce swift, devastating effects under a completely different set of rules, and the game isn't going to grind to a halt while we debate the mystical physics of what is actually taking place when little girls flip over tanks with the power of their minds.

Typical Denizens

Humanity is caught between a rock and a hard place, fearful of the unexplainable psychic phenomena emanating from their midst while simultaneously living in the shadow of otherworldly conquerors. Still, despite the terrors and the strangeness, the masses strive for normalcy. Having weathered the Incursion occupation for over two decades, most people have given up the notion of rebellion, grimly grateful they still have cubicles in which to work and shopping malls in which they can buy the latest phones and fashions. You see, after the shock and violent spasms of the initial invasion, the Incursion made it clear they had no designs on micromanaging the daily lives of average citizens; while presidents and generals were hobbled, the regular folk of the world were left alone so long as they threw no stones. Nowadays, people still live in cities and suburbs, going to school and buying groceries, desperately pretending everything is okay even though they shudder at the buzz of Incursion drones overhead

and whisper suspiciously about whether their neighbor's kid is showing signs of being 'one of those freaks'.

Many people have given up and given in, resigned to dull, gray lives they pray are safe from the terrors all around. Others have retreated into superstition, calling upon ancient ways to ward themselves against evil and reckon with the spirits which now encroach upon the Earth from below as assuredly as the alien overlords have descended from above. Many young people rebel in other ways, joining costumed motorcycle gangs, listening to dark "psi" music (supposedly composed by psi-active virtuosos), and retreating into immersive virtual reality video games. Human figureheads complicit in the occupation run local governments under martial law, enforcing day-to-day order with militarized human police forces – a strategy the figureheads maintain is necessary to keep heavy-handed Incursion troopers from having to step in, which wouldn't be good for anyone. Fear and distrust run rampant, with occupation propaganda constantly offering rewards for people to report insurgents and/or anyone suspected of being a psi-active. Psi-actives, they say, are dangers to the public peace which must be contained and registered with the occupation government (who, once they've sufficiently disappeared them from public view, will secretly render the psi-actives over to the Incursion for experimental research upon request).

Psi-active humans have difficult lives. As if it weren't bad enough to be cursed with terrifying powers which strain your sanity and endanger those around you, it's worse to be shunned and hunted for those powers by an omnipresent and seemingly omnipotent alien force. Most psi-actives take great pains to hide their gifts, numbing their minds with drugs and booze when they can't cope and training in secret with other psi-actives if they're lucky enough to find a friend. Highly secretive networks of psi-actives do exist, run by brilliant psychers who are also the backbone of the human resistance, but these underground railroads and safe havens are notoriously unforgiving of internal strife; after all, a single phone call by a suspicious bystander can bring down a hard rain

of dozens of jack-booted Incursion thugs with designs on turning anyone with psionic talent into an expendable lab rat.

The Incursion occupiers remain largely a mystery. Despite two decades of contact, precious little is known about the Incursion, as they take great pains to control what information humanity might be able to learn about their physiology, technology, tactics, or internal structure. Incursion forces remain sequestered inside their ships and hovercraft whenever possible, relying on drones, androids, and human pawns to carry out ground operations. When Incursion soldiers do venture out they're encased from head to toe in their trademark armor, complete with fully enclosed helmets and life support systems, so it's tough to get to know them. A few Incursion troopers have been killed and examined over the years; one account described the creature inside the armor as some kind of bipedal lizard-man, while another dissection found a horrific black-skinned monster with needle teeth and six eyes. Oftentimes the troopers are non-living androids with nothing inside the armor but metal and wires, and there's one tale of finding a cybernetically-augmented human inside. Few records survive of these discoveries and dissections because the Incursion makes it an operational priority to eradicate the remains of their fallen or captured, either through self-destruct failsafes, merciless clean-up crews with superior firepower, or orbital bombardment if necessary. Personally, I suspect this particular Incursion expeditionary force is made up of multiple different species – or at least their grunts are – so all the stories are true to some degree, though that doesn't help much in discovering some universal weakness in hopes of breaking their iron grip on this Earth.

Threats

Psychers are the movers and shakers of this Gossamer world – psi-active humans who don't just have psychic powers – they have *a lot* of psychic power. While a lesser psi-active telepath might be able to listen to someone's surface thoughts, or speak wordlessly across a room, a telepathic psycher can download, rewrite, and reinsert a village's entire mental existence in an instant, or broadcast their whims across half the planet as easy as breathing. Where a novice telekinetic might be able to throw chairs around a room, or break glass by looking at it funny, a telekinetic psycher can hurl mountains or drop their crushing will on an entire city with the force of a 50-megaton bomb. A pyrokinetic psycher, should such a terrible thing even exist, would probably be more elemental than human, liable to ignite the atmosphere and burn the Earth to a cinder. How these unstable demigods have not yet inadvertently destroyed the planet is either insane luck and/or a bit of a mystery. Part of it is that the Incursion hunts down and captures psychers with scientific diligence, subjecting these ultra-powerful psi-actives to rigorous (and usually fatal) testing. The other part is that many psychers have taken it upon themselves to look out for one another, forming a network of super-humans with little in common other than their shattered lives, strained minds, and fervent desire to repel the Incursion and liberate Earth.

Most psychers are little more than children

Psychers and Superpowers

The most powerful Psychers have mental might rivaling that of a Gossamer Lord, so feel free to create psycher characters with a Psyche ranked on the Attribute Ladder. Likewise, a psycher may be able to do the equivalent of Deadly Damage (or worse) depending on their particular powers. Don't be shy about showcasing the devastating potential of these very special, very dangerous people.

– tortured teenagers and maladjusted adults pushed to and past their breaking points by powers they can't control, given to them for reasons they can't understand, in a world under siege they can't hope to save. Well-traveled Gossamer Lords and Ladies might be used to encountering psyches full of reality-rending power, but I'll caution you: psychers are extremely dangerous. This gossamer reality is super-charged with psychic energy in the same way a log cabin might be soaked in kerosene; this is not a stable situation, and just because the world hasn't ended yet is no guarantee that it won't.

Incursion Strategos Tau-Psi-5 is the leader of the Incursion expeditionary force which presently dominates this gossamer reality. Like the rest of the present Incursion forces, Tau-Psi-5 arrived in this world thirty years ago through the Door on Saturn's moon Titan. At that time Tau-Psi-5 was only second-in-command of the Incursion fleet, but upon realizing the transcendent potential of psychic power possible in this Gossamer world – and his own talent for the same – he chose ambition over protocol and slew the over-cautious, by-the-book former strategos in a brief but brutal mutiny. How exactly this heretical little coup went over with Incursion high command (wherever that is) is unknown, but the practical reality is that Tau-Psi-5 seems confident in his local power... though he isn't interested in stepping back onto the Grand Stair any time soon. Nowadays, commanding through loyal lieutenants and strength of personality backed by the implicit threat of his terrifying psychic abilities, Tau-Psi-5 directs the Incursion toward the goal of further research into and complete mastery of psionics. While he probably wouldn't otherwise bother with the villainous cliché of conquering the lesser

beings of some backwater planet, domination of the Earth is an essential tactical step in securing access to humanity's psi-active population and the rich experimental resource they present. A bit of a showman, Tau-Psi-5 takes sinister glee in playing conquering overlord as the years tick by and Incursion scientists inch ever closer toward a complete understanding of this Gossamer world's psychic phenomena... and how they might be replicated elsewhere on the Grand Stair and beyond.

Incursion Strategos Tau-Psi-5

Attributes

Psyche – 45 Points
Strength – 15 Points
Endurance – 20 Points
Warfare – 50 Points

Powers

Sorcery (Psionics) [15 Points] – Tau-Psi-5's psionic abilities mimic the Sorcery Spells of Mind Touch, Quell, Death, Immobility, Weaken, Barrier (telekinetic shield), Psychic Ward, Bolt (pyrokinesis), Environmental Attack (pyrokinesis), and Teleport.

Cantrips (Psionics) [5 Points] – Focus, Fracture, Grasp, Pain, and Stun

Artifacts & Creatures

Incursion Expeditionary Force 626

[44 Points] – Strategos Tau-Psi-5 commands a moderate-sized fleet of spacecraft, orbital landers, scout ships, and assorted hover-vehicles manned by thousands of disciplined and highly trained Incursion operatives, overseers, pilots, soldiers, scientists, etc.

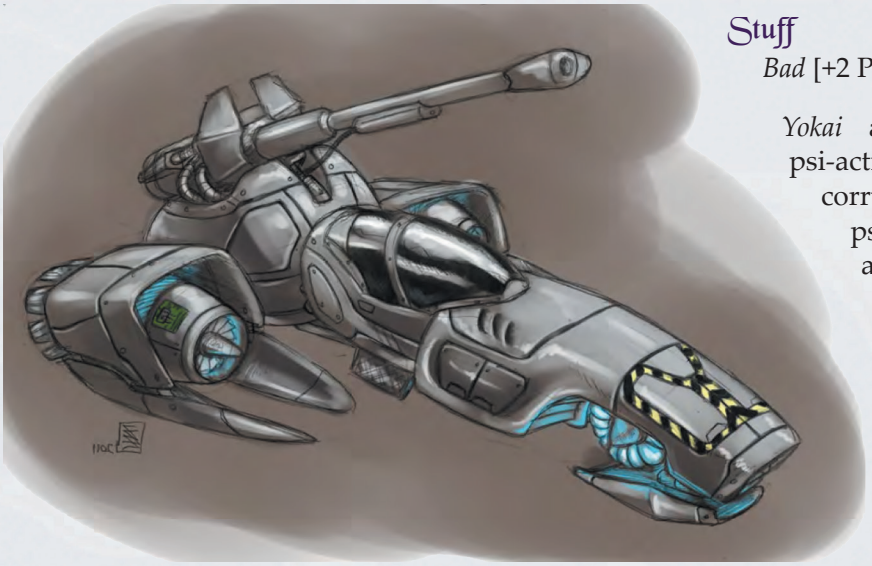
- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Hardened [1 Point] *(Double Damage for heavy artillery)*
- Superior Stamina [1 Point]
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point] *(Resistant to Firearms for heavy artillery)*
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- Pass Through Door [1 Point] *(when outfitted with functioning Incursion dimension-tech)*
- Rapid Healing [2 Points] *(medical nanobots injected into the bloodstream, can be disrupted by strong electromagnetic fields)*
- Worldwide [x4 Points]

Tau-Psi-5's Helmet & Armor [8 Points] – While it appears to be standard-issue Incursion equipment, Tau-Psi-5 has poured significant resources into making his souped-up personal armor the pinnacle of Incursion technology.

- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points] – the helmet's psychic barrier functions only when worn, so Tau-Psi-5 is obliged to remove it if and when he wishes to use his own psionics.

The Big Gun [8 Points] – Pulled from the business-end of an Incursion battleship, Tau-Psi-5's enormous graviton-stabilized, shoulder-mounted antimatter beam cannon can punch a hole through a moon, and the targeting system wired into his helmet can pinpoint a target the size of a car from over seven miles away.

- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Limited Mold Gossamer Reality [2 Points] – originally designed to be powered by a starship reactor, The Big Gun has been modified to convert and run on psychic energy – either drawn from its wielder, or drained from nearby victims.



Stuff

Bad [+2 Points]

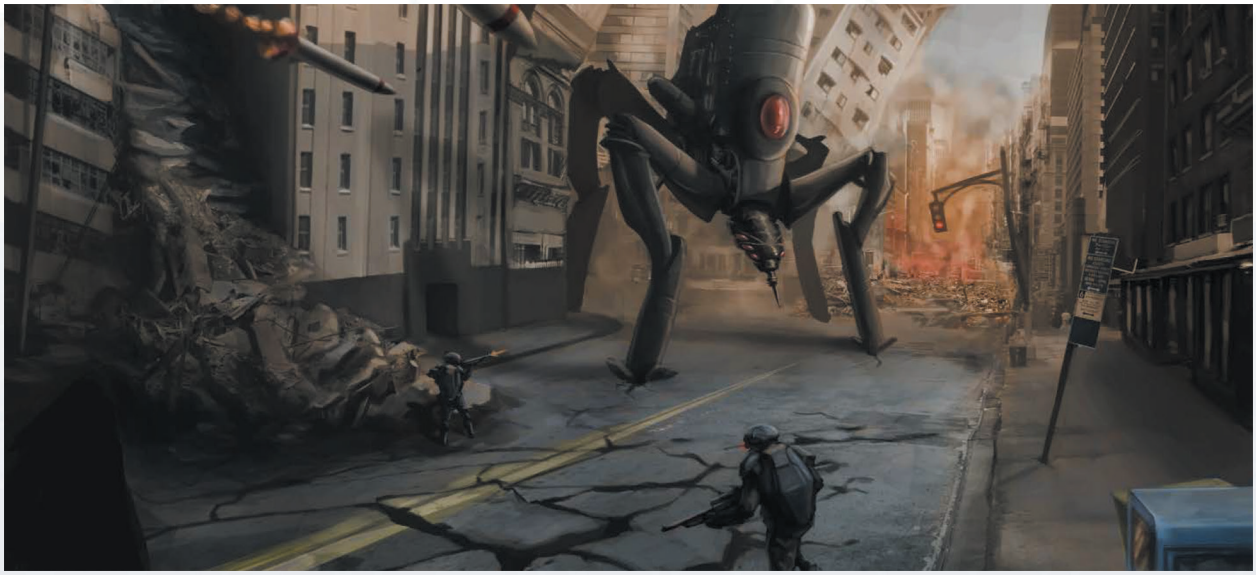
Yokai are hybrid monstrosities – psi-active humans infected and corrupted by ancient bodiless psionic entities which, for lack of a better description, we might as well consider to be evil spirits. Before the Incursion breached this Gossamer world and all hell broke loose (literally), these Earth-native evil spirits were the mostly-dormant subject of folklore and

myth – ghosts, poltergeists, and demons who had long ago retreated from the light, relegated to forgotten shadows and rare nightmares. But when reality cracked and psychic energy levels went through the roof, these intangible boogiemen took the opportunity to re-assert themselves in the modern world, feasting on super-psyched fear and possessing the bodies of traumatized psi-actives. Yokai have physical deformities which signal the possession of a host, such as demonic features (red skin, bulging eyes, tusks) or additional body parts (elongated necks, extra mouths, vestigial twins), or animalistic features ranging from the cosmetic (furry ears, tails, forked tongues) to the extreme (human heads atop the body of a giant spider, scorpion, or serpent). Though the yokai hate the interloping Incursion, and the-enemy-of-my-enemy and all that, even their unholy harassment of Incursion forces is small consolation compared to the terrifying prospect of being left alone with the yokai should the Earth ever be liberated. Unsurprisingly: super-psychics + evil spirits = awful crazy badness, so beware. Cue the giant scorpion-person-thing in a kabuki mask vomiting mind-napalm directly into your brain, followed by some creepy little schoolgirl with cat ears giggling as she telekinetically vivisects the one teammate who let his guard down. Ugh. I'd rather face the alien overlords.

Notable locations

Occupied Tokyo is one of the largest mega-cities on Earth – and a stronghold of the Incursion-controlled occupational government. While the glitzy, overbuilt sprawl of concrete and steel is still a massive population center and a bustling hub of industry, the marks of Incursion influence are everywhere. Gargantuan holo-screens float above the skyline like freaky jellyfish-looking blimp-TVs, broadcasting propaganda, public service announcements, and the occasional not-so-subtle threat by a helmeted overlord. Docile citizens shuffle the sidewalks in quiet but constant anxiety, burying their heads in the fashionable glow of the latest In-Phone (another victory of insidious Incursion infiltration, simultaneously monitoring and placating the population with high-end consumer electronics; this one even has a built-in app for detecting and reporting psi-active disturbances).

Incursion medical towers gleam like smooth white tusks amongst the conventional skyscrapers, treating, healing, and converting millions of suffering people each year with miraculous Incursion-developed cures for everything from cancer and rare diseases to impotence and depression. With the occupation propaganda machine and incentive programs in full swing, positive public opinion of the occupation is higher in Tokyo than any other major city on Earth,



but a significant percentage still resist. Human insurgents plot the assassination of traitors in the occupa-tional government, surveil Incursion positions for any hint of weakness, and stockpile artillery in the faint hope of one day striking back.

Criminal motorcycle gangs are a nuisance on the city streets and super-highways, but the relatively juvenile trouble they cause – robberies, street racing, and property damage – is mostly just a headache for the government police and a useful scapegoat for the headlines of occupation news programs. The black-clad, militarized occupational police force stomps around the city, raiding the hideouts of alleged troublemakers and swarming over reports of rogue psionic activity, but the real fear is palpable when Incursion drones and hover-ships fill the air. Far below the gleaming skyscrapers and neon-lit streets, the Tokyo underground is rife with the secret predations of the yokai; drawing desperate to-be-hosts to profane shrines in dried-up sewers and abandoned subway tunnels, these ancient boogeymen in stolen bodies are steadily building an unholy army of their own. A Door to this Gossamer world opens into a bustling subway stop directly below the heart of downtown Tokyo, right next to a shabby news (read: occupation propaganda) stand that always smells like burnt plastic to me.

Half a mile below the blasted ruins of the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, an ultra-secret cabal calling itself "Uncle Sam" bides its time, training a highly gifted cadre of psychers for an inevitable counter-offensive against the invading alien force. Shielded (or so they hope) from Incursion sensors by the residual radiation which still saturates the surface due to the nuclear bombing of nearby Washington, D.C., this highly organized group is the best of what remains of the United States' armed forces and intelligence services, doggedly analyzing every possible method of repelling the Incursion. Uncle Sam's massive underground facility is a sprawling maze of laboratories, bunkers, and sub-basements which connects to a water-logged natural cave system riddling the bedrock deep below the irradiated Potomac River. While this might seem like a safe place to duck some heat from the Incursion, I can tell you from experience that the human defenders of this facility (highly trained special forces units paired with government-raised psychic hunter-killers) are even more ruthless than their otherworldly foes. If you don't have an extremely convincing cover story and a good friend with a very high security clearance to vouch for you, best to avoid this place... unless you enjoy getting riddled with depleted-uranium rounds while your brain gets scrambled like an egg.

Irkutsk, Siberia is the location of Camp Shima, the Incursion's largest and most notorious ground-based psi-active containment and experimentation facility. While a great deal of research into psi-actives is undertaken on Incursion ships in orbit, there's something to be said for *not* poking dangerous psychics with

probes inside valuable spaceships that tend to explosively decompress if a wily telekinetic happens to rupture the hull in a fit of pique. Hence, the Incursion claimed the entire city of Irkutsk in 1995, driving away most of the city's citizens and using those who remained as fodder for psionic experiments. Nowadays Irkutsk is a vast ghost town pock-marked with detonation craters and burnt buildings – scars wrought from twenty years of psychers overloading and/or the Incursion containment responses which put them down. Heavily shielded observation bunkers connected by underground tunnels dot the landscape, providing Incursion scientists with cloistered vantage points from which to watch their test subjects respond to staged stimuli and navigate the dilapidated city like rats in a maze. Champ Shima is itself surrounded by hundreds of miles of the densest security the Incursion can muster – hover-tank patrols, radar, sensors, force fields, anti-aircraft lasers, multiphasic psionic jammers, you name it; absent clever magic (which a canny Gossamer Lord may indeed have), it's one of those places you can probably only get into if the Incursion brings you there. Evil overlord and Strategos Tau-Psi-5 makes regular visits to Camp Shima to test his own psionic prowess against captive psychers, moving slowly but inexorably toward the day when Incursion mastery of psionic technology is complete and they can move on to conquer the next world.

Final Thoughts

Incursion Earth 626 is place with plenty of problems, but amazing potential. Beware its dangers – the Incursion haven't conquered entire expanses of the Grand Stair by luck or lack of opposition alone, and that wily bastard Tau-Psi-5 isn't afraid to get unorthodox and diabolical in order to maintain control. The heady, practically intoxicating power of the psychic energies which saturate this Gossamer world is a potent lure for any traveller of the Grand Stair, so it's a uniquely advantageous place to stretch one's psyche – just make sure not to snap it.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Electric (Earth) / Fusion (the Incursion)
Magic Level:	Magic is Unknown (but Psionics are Known and Believed)
Security:	None (though the Incursion does monitor all known Doors)
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: the Incursion)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Average Wrighting – Average
*Special:	*The Mind Unleashed* – Psionics are the predominant form of supernatural activity on Incursion Earth 626, with a recent and precipitous increase in latent psychic energies. While within this Gossamer world, Gossamer Lords and other visitors from the Grand Stair treat their Psyche score as 5 ranks higher on the Attribute Ladder (or the next-higher rank if they possess only an Average- or Superior-ranked Psyche). See also *Psionics vs. Sorcery*.

How to Use Incursion Earth 626

- The character's mentor suggests they develop their mental prowess (Psyche scores) by taking advantage of Incursion Earth 626's super-saturated psychic environment. Training begins at one of the mentor's secret safe houses, but the location is revealed to be not-so-safe when a harried telepathic psycher lands on the characters' doorstep with an Incursion capture team in hot pursuit.

- The Incursion is on the move elsewhere on the Grand Stair, and the player characters are tasked with gathering intelligence on this threat and retrieving a sample of their technology. Incursion Earth 626 is a convenient world upon which to approach the mysterious technocrats; a captured Incursion trooper would make a fine prize for study, and it'd be ideal if the characters could beg, borrow, or steal massive data files on the topic from the human resistance based deep below the irradiated ruins of the Pentagon.

- A psionic spirit – the type to create a yokai – has escaped from Incursion Earth 626 onto the Grand Stair. Desperate for a body, the spirit attempts to possess a character or ally, and whether successful or not eventually explains where it came from – and begs the player characters to help save its home from alien invaders. The spirit makes itself sympathetic at first, but once the characters reach the world and come to understand the sinister nature of the yokai, they realize that this Gossamer world Earth needs to be saved from not just one threat, but two.

- There is a prophecy that a god-like psycher from this Gossamer world is destined to become a Gossamer Lord – or at least attain the vaunted power of one – and soon there will be a critical moment where their path toward good or evil will be decided forever. The player characters aren't the only ones with this knowledge, or an interest in directing the way this person's fate turns.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Poetica Mundi

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Poetica Mundi

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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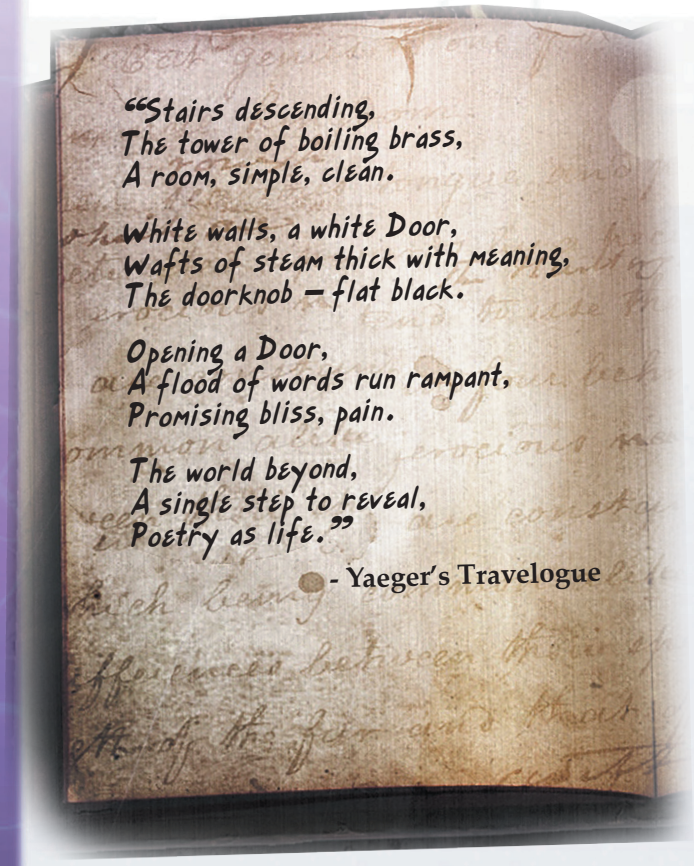

"Stairs descending,
The tower of boiling brass,
A room, simple, clean.

White walls, a white Door,
Wafts of steam thick with meaning,
The doorknob – flat black.

Opening a Door,
A flood of words run rampant,
Promising bliss, pain.

The world beyond,
A single step to reveal,
Poetry as life."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

There once was a gossamer realm,
With poetical force at the helm,
In delicate prose,
They spun weals and woes,

And nursed every ash, oak, and elm.
The waves and the wind and the hills,
Shift as pentameter spills,

These lyrical words,
Sing brightly as birds,
A manifestation of wills.

Sometimes it is madness, be sure,
Banality's bane is its cure,
When poetry's pouring,
Never tis boring,

Wide wonders drip wet with allure.
It isn't all mindless depravity,
There're reasonable poems about gravity,

But should a tongue waver,
And lose lyric's favor,
This sweetness... something something… cavity?

Damn.

I had the rhythm going for a while, but I lost it. Tough to keep up. You see, I'm in Poetica Mundi while composing this entry, so I've got to play by their rules. Everything has to be a damn poem here. Even thinking in not-poetry is taxing, like the gossamer reality itself is rejecting the... Ow.

Worry years chip off my life,
Prose has brought nothing but strife,
It's kinda sing-songy,
But just play along-y,
Words are as sharp as a knife.

Better...ish. My limericks are shaky. Maybe quatrains or tercets or... Ow.

I really need to find a Muse,
Before more language I abuse.
A rhyme about beer will make everything clear;
gossamer hears and my brew now appears!
With cool suds a-drinking, my poet-brain's thinking,
my artistry barely less stinking.
Rough, but enough.

What is Poetry?

Poetry comes in many forms: ballads, concrete poetry, couplets, doggerel, epics, epigrams, free verse, haiku, iambic pentameter, limericks, octaves, odes, pastorals, quatrains, rengu, rhymes, riddles, rondeau, slams, song lyrics, sonnets, tanka, villanelles, and more. Research and use as many as suit your game – but above all, have fun with language, be expressive, creative, not restrictive.

A land of beauty – verdant, lush,
Forests sleep with pregnant hush,
Hillocks kissed by sunset's blush.

Kingdoms of pastoral bliss,
Split twixt counties of that and this,
As poets dream and reminisce.

Green and rolling County Brook,
With miller's grist and shepherd's crook,
As roosters crow and farmwives cook.

Dark and brooding County Callow,
Homes sit dark and fields lay fallow,
Pining o'er fresh graves too shallow.

Twisting twilight County Grable,
Realm of elves and faerie fable,
Witching hours black as sable.

Spring eternal County Grace,
Where lovers twine in fond embrace,
Flowers shroud each trysting place.

Cheery, lofty County Moon,
Castles float like bright balloon,
Breezes sing a children's tune.

Weird and wicked County Zeem,
Astronauts and men of steam,
Their future wonders whir and gleam.

Shifting borders sift like sands,
Ephemeral and changing lands,
Evolving as the verse commands.

Typical Denizens

The Poets populate this rhyming realm,
Their words and songs upon the world's helm.

Within each county stirs a beating heart,
Who stokes the flame of poetry's fine art.

As man, or fey, or beast with speaking gift,
These dukes let not their shape define their drift.

Be ye a knight, or sprite, or biting thing,
Tis vim and verve with verse what makes a king.

So oft the captain of a land entire,
May be no more than humble, humming squire.

But hark, when humble voices speak their words,
Ascend the stars, and sing again sweet birds.

Ensconced in lives their musing habits made,
Few Poets ply their skills in war or trade.

Poet Power

Poets – denizens of Poetica Mundi with the innate ability to shape reality with their poetry – come in all shapes, sizes, and species. A Poet may have the qualities Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point], Mold Gossamer Creatures [2 Points], or Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points], and the most powerful Poets some may have Superior- or Paragon-level Attributes, as well as their own lesser forms of Sorcery or other Powers.

A simple life, in hamlets blessed by peace,
Content souls rest ere tranquil beauty cease.

Should any raise alarm – the hue and cry,
Let slip the dogs, as tongues will lash and lie.

Their verses weave the goss'mer strand,
To call the falling stars and seed the land.

So heed the bard or witch who rhymes a hex,
For those who guard the realm, the realm protects.

Not all who walk and talk a Poet be,
Seems some are merely poems roaming free.

In living, laughing Poets do create,
The world, its turns, and what shall be our fate.

The Muses fuel the mind and heart like flame,
Swift inspiration stoking poet's fame.

Their forms are many – creature, thing, and place,
Yet all do speak, though some may lack a face.

Consider all the lovely birds who sing,
And with sweet singing, tender poems bring.

Quite A-Musing

Muses are living (though sometimes inanimate and/or ephemeral) fonts of power in Poetica Mundi, and enable Poets – and others versed in the ways of shaping gossamer reality – to mold gossamer matter with strength and ease. Muses may have the qualities Connected to a Power [1 Point], Linked to a Power [2 Points], or Integral to a Power [4 Points], depending on what type of grand works they inspire; particularly valuable Muses may have these qualities with respect to multiple Powers, or all Powers, as they enable all great things.

Behold the mighty mountain who doth loom,
And urge poor awe-struck souls to murmur doom.

Then ponder 'pon the babbling brook so pure,
That all who drink, their thirst forever cure.

Keep dear the locket holding lovers past,
For sure as ghosts these memories do last.

A golden sunset glowing in the hills,
Can speak as well as people when it wills.

These Muses more than humble spirits be,
For by their gifts they set great power free.

To Poets they impart inspiring thought,
Each like an engine churning, burning hot.

Sustained by what their Poets say and do,
So thrive the Muses ever strong and true.

The Mora knight shall find a page and horse.

Adventures great the knight may earn in spades,
But as the verses cease his substance fades.

So too the mice who scamper cross the floor,
Til Poets mind them not and speak no more.

Has each a soul, or dream of lives gone past?
Tis hard to say, for few are long to last.

Like fleeting flowers in their seasons bloom,
An end is just an end, and not a doom.

Though living, laughing, loving Morae be,
Their fates weigh less than foam upon the sea.

Threats

Mary Fair, of Copper Hair,
Once did wander 'pon the Stair,
What humble hamlet whence she came,
Ne'er would fate return her there.

A thousand years her power grew,
She learnt the names of what was true,
In wrighting wrought a gallery,
Then opened Doors, and locked a few.

Her lover Sven long by her side,
A bear of a man, too coarse to hide,
That he walked slower, stumbled more,
One day beside the path, he died.

Song and verse her treasured arts,
Mare combed the Stair in all its parts,
Looking for the words eternal,
A single key to all realms, all hearts.

Then through Door with rhyming lilt,
She found a way which soothed her guilt,
Amongst a realm older than stones,
With poetry a kingdom built.

Mary Fair, of Copper Hair,
Now rules this world of lyric flair,
A gracious queen – no tyrant she,
But be polite, and foes beware.

Mary Fair, of Copper Hair

Attributes

Psyche – 55 Points
Strength – 20 Points
Endurance – 40 Points
Warfare – 5 Points

Powers

Invocation [20 Points]
Master of the Grand Stair [35 Points]
Wrighting [30 Points]

Artifacts & Creatures

An Allusionary Anthropomorphic Army [42 Points] – Bobbins large and mountains small, creatures wide and whimsies tall, these agents of great Mary Fair are all about and everywhere. Of any form and any size, sharp their claws and keen their eyes, never to forsake their duty, they slay her foes and guard her booty.

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Hardened [1 Point]
- Superior Stamina [1 Point]
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
- Regeneration [4 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point]
- Limited Shape-Shift [4 Points]
- Horde [x3 Points]

The Looking Book [6 Points] – Thoughtful Mary keeps a book, within its pages she can look; full of folks she knows quite well, the pages hold sly wrighting's spell.

- Set of Icons [2 Points]
- Able to Speak [1 Point]
- Psychic Sensitivity [1 Point]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]

Stuff

Good [+3 Points]

Fractalox fly free,
Beings of poetic math,
Shapes, lines – such beauty,

Angles of order without,
Chaos theory lurks within.

Polygon tendrils,
Two dimensional bodies,
Raw geometries,
Their gleaming eyes unblinking,
Their strange minds inscrutable.
Like odd jellyfish,

Fractalox float and observe,
Silent as the grave,
Pondering deep equations,
Variables to be solved.

Beware their numbers,
Asymptote spines razor sharp,
Toxic remainders,
And dire bounding function,
Whose lines imprison the soul.

Single eye burning,
Its gaze is pure white death,
An unbroken line,
No hatred taints its null heart,
No pity stays its cold deeds.
Motives unspoken,

For ages they have wandered,
Seeking and searching,
From whence came the Fractalox?
What role the Annunaki?

Orange is a vile and mystical pox,
A bright, itchy rash from your head to your socks,

You can't think of rhyme and you can't think of song,
Every word flounders and just comes out wrong.

Orange is the color of hex and affliction,
A sure sign your luck will despair with your diction,

Voices turn hoarse as poetry stumbles,
Pustules form and gossamer crumbles.

Those with the Orange become outcasts and lepers,
Scratching their blisters and smelling of peppers,

No one wants any of what they have got,
Tis better to burn them then catch the foul rot.

We don't know if Orange is the symptom or cause,
Of rhyming afoul of these gossamer laws,

Even if no one for miles does scratch,
With too many foibles the Orange you can catch.

No one's immune to this terrible ill,
Heroes and villains alike it can kill,

Sapping your vigor 'til willpower breaks,
Fevers bring madness and chills bring the shakes.

Poor souls who perish from Orange's curse,
Don't just pass away – oh no, it's far worse,

Zombies of umber and pumpkin-hued ghasts,
Shamble the land as their agony lasts.

Curing this sickness takes lots of hard work,
If friends rhyme your name then your health it will perk,

Mathematical Monsters

Fractalox exist in a multitude of sizes and variations, each with different abilities and power levels, but here's a strong one:

Hexagonal Green Fractalox

3rd Standard Deviation

Animal Vitality [1 Point]

Engine Speed [4 Points]

Tireless Stamina [4 Points]

Combat Reflexes [2 Points]

Deadly Damage [4 Points]

Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]

Psychic Barrier [4 Points]

True Name is Warded [2 Points]

This Fractalox also has innate abilities equivalent to the Sorcery spells Immobility, Invisibility, Barrier (force field plane), Bolt (laser eye-beam), and Teleport.

Surest of all is poetic oration,
Bolstered with Power of true Invocation.

Speak with great care when discussing this plague,
Its name springs a trap if you can't keep it vague,

Nothing's so sure to infect you with Orange,
Than ending a rhyme with... it.

Sh*t.

Notable Locations

Meadowland, sweet pastoral paradise
rolling hills
marshy swales
shady vales
afternoons of velvet, verdant green.

Meadowland, grass fit for a queen
golden sheep
happy dogs
lazy shepherds
Mary Fair's perfect pasture palace.

Meadowland, a motley court convenes
puffing poets
talking beasts
singing kettles
in many voices such strange chorus.

Meadowland, where Muses bend to sip
power springs
burbling streams
clear ambrosia
a long cool drink renews the spirit.

Meadowland, the cornucopia
knowing apples
honeyed words
pregnant pauses
poems read well-fed prolonged in season.

Meadowland, jewel of County Brook
paths crossing
signposts swaying
hamlets drowsing
a Door opens in farmhouse quiet.

Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town,
Madness Lurks inSide it,
Saner Minds deNied it,
County Zeem does Hide it,
True is False and Up is Down,
Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town.

Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town,
Clockworks Doomed to Disgrace,
Really Not a Nice place,
If you Show a Flesh-face,
Well-deServed its Fell reNown,
Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town.

Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town,
Backwards Clockmen Tickle,
Gizmos Clack and Clickle,
Cranky Androids Prickle,
Fractured Futures Wear a Frown,
Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town.

Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town,
Shiny Metal Spires,
Burning Barrel Fires,
Poets Bound in Wires,
Robots Bleeding Rusty Brown,
Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town.

Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town,
Hanging Morae Dangle,
Killer Cyborgs Mangle,
Put the Fang in Fangle,
Hopes in Acid Oceans Drown,
Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town.

Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town,
Whispers As the Wind blows,
Where the Secret Heir goes,
Mary Fair – oh She knows,
Here there Hides a Second Crown,
Higgledy-Piggledy Newfangle Town.

Caesura's void // the space between all things,
Step back as empty chasm parts the sand,
Give pause // for in such silence absence sings.
A gulf no bird can cross upon its wings,
Beside its edge the gods must wait and stand,
Caesura's void // the space between all things.

Down canyon infinite no echo rings,
Realm's meat split down to bone by Shadow's hand,
Give pause // for in such silence absence sings.
No Poet can weave rhyme to pull its strings,
By rivers shifting whim it carves the land,

Caesura's void // the space between all things.
An ordered verse this halting border brings,
Lest fancy run amok as bards demand,
Give pause // for in such silence absence sings.
Across eternity Caesura springs,
A breath perchance by breathing understand,
Caesura's void // the space between all things,
Give pause // for in such silence absence sings.

Final Thoughts

Poetry made real,
recited with such zeal,
great beauty and appeal,
coax even jaded hearts to feel.

So up or down the stairway climb,
pause to have a lovely time,
luxuriate in verse sublime,
but keep your wits and know your rhyme.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Variable (but most commonly Medieval)
Magic Level:	Magic is Commonplace
Security:	None
Type:	Primal World [4 Points] (current owner: Mary Fair)
Control:	Control of Time Flow [2 Points]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Powerful Umbra – Powerful Wrighting – Easily Used
*Special:	*Poetry in Motion** – Poetry is the very fabric of this world, and that fundamental truth controls this gossamer reality as surely as any system of physics or magic. While the definition of "poetry" should be expansive and flexible – not everything has to rhyme – characters inside the world should be required to obey the following laws: • Poetry is both the spiritual substance of the world and the motive force behind all forms of creation, destruction, and change. • All communication, whether it be spoken, written, or conveyed telepathically, shall be in poetry. • Any important action (battling a dragon, searching for treasure, building a house, embracing a lover) shall be accompanied by the recitation of a poem describing the activity. This includes any exercise of a Power.

Gamemasters should enforce these strictures; not by declaring non-poetic things impossible, but by emphasizing how the gossamer reality resists and rejects them. Non-poetic speech falls flat and sounds offensive, sure to raise the ire of the natives. Non-poetic actions are less likely to succeed and are burdensome to carry out, requiring escalating tests of Endurance. Non-poetic information from other worlds corrupts, warps, and becomes unintelligible. Gamemasters should incentivize players to participate in this surreal reality. Enthusiastic (not necessarily good) poetry may be rewarded with positive outcomes, lucky breaks, Good Stuff, or even bonus advancement points, as suits the game.

How to Use Poetica Mundi

- We're always saying the infinite cosmos is populated by strange realms governed by bizarre natural laws beyond the ken of physics and sense. This is one of those worlds, so put your multiverse where your mouth is and embrace the weird.

- The quirks of Poetica Mundi make it a great disruptor of outside hierarchies. Rivals who are hopelessly mismatched elsewhere may find themselves on even – or oddly uneven – ground when the fight comes to a land where poetry is power, and one side has a knack for verse and the other does not.

- Mary Fair (of Copper Hair) makes for a valuable ally or mentor. She once wandered vast stretches of the Grand Stair and still recalls a great deal of very useful information; with her ability for Wrighting, she can be just a picture and a poetic response away from providing characters with riddling insights.

- An ally of the characters in Poetica Mundi has contracted the vile pox known as "the Orange". A garbled half-rhyming distress call implores the characters to come to the rescue – a rescue possible only through the restorative power of poetry.

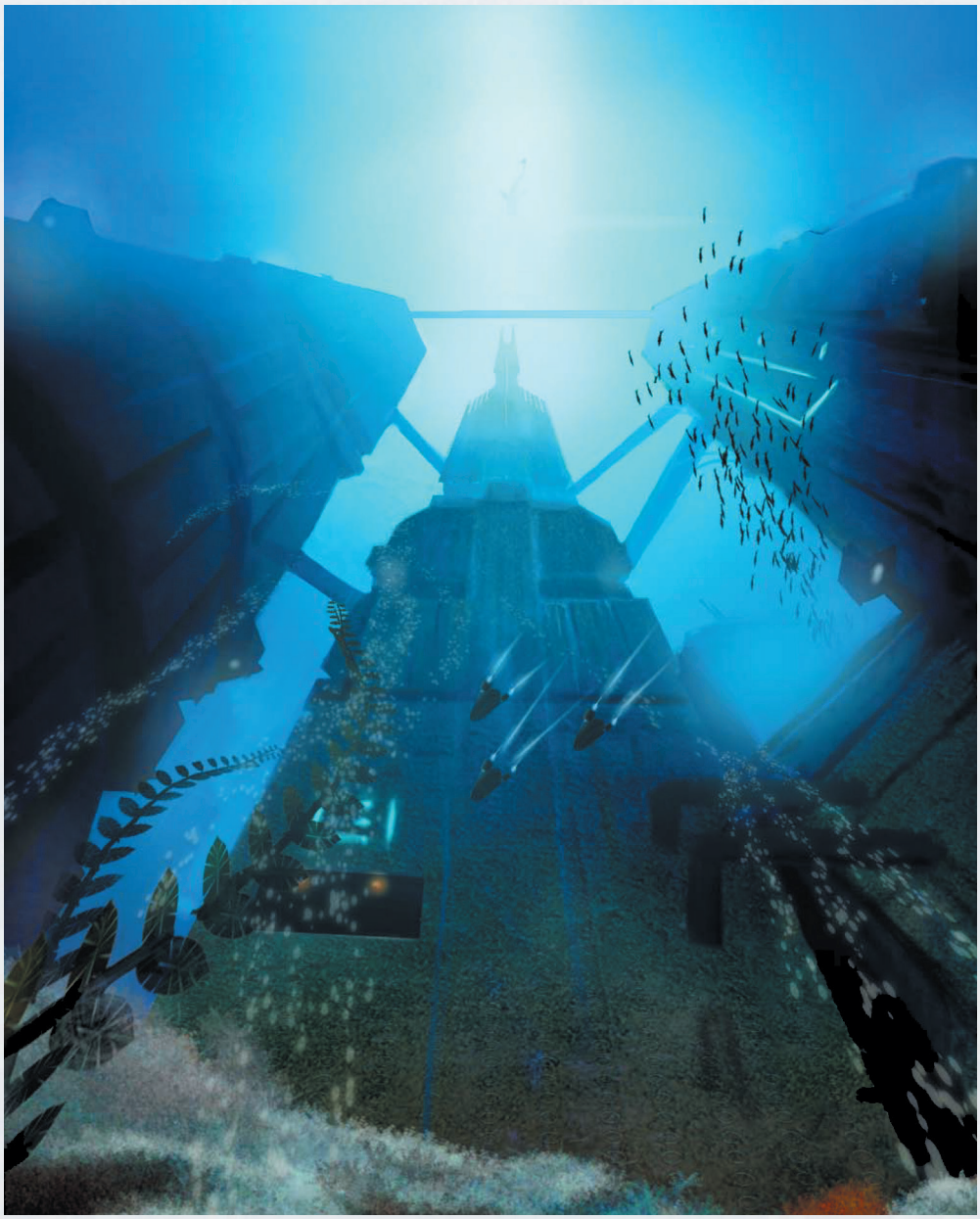
- Despite – or perhaps because of – its odd qualities, Poetica Mundi is a primal world brimming over with power, where the shaping of reality is frighteningly easy. A rival of the characters selects this Gossamer world as a base of operations for the next step of a master plan, and suddenly its worth becomes evident.

- Encourage poetic speech as much as possible by players while the characters are in Poetica Mundi. Not everything needs to be a Shakespearean epic – basic rhymes and quoted song lyrics will do. Have fun!

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Poseidon's Rapture



by Matt Banach

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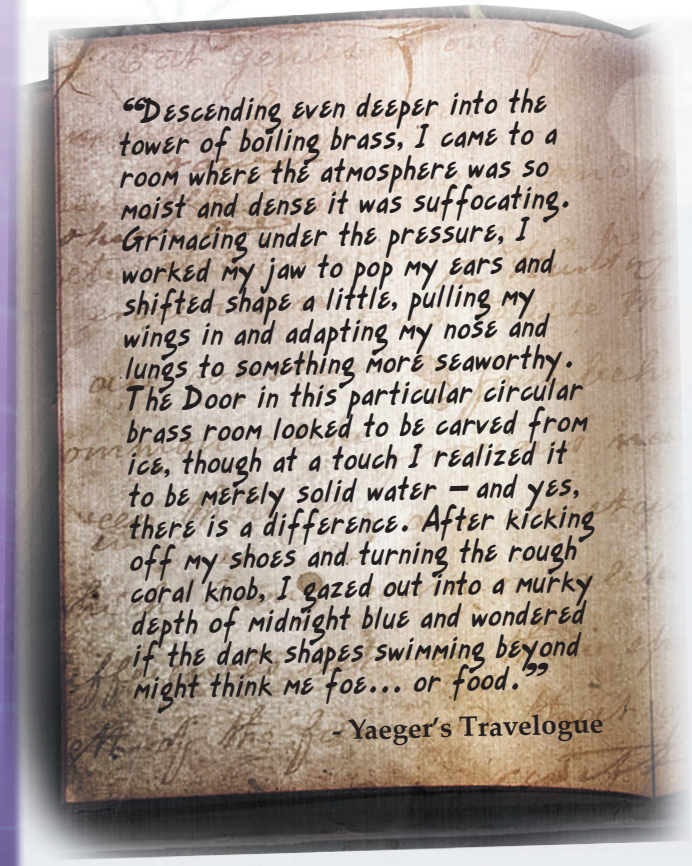

"Descending even deeper into the tower of boiling brass, I came to a room where the atmosphere was so moist and dense it was suffocating. Grimacing under the pressure, I worked my jaw to pop my ears and shifted shape a little, pulling my wings in and adapting my nose and lungs to something more seaworthy. The Door in this particular circular brass room looked to be carved from ice, though at a touch I realized it to be merely solid water — and yes, there is a difference. After kicking off my shoes and turning the rough coral knob, I gazed out into a murky depth of midnight blue and wondered if the dark shapes swimming beyond might think me foe... or food."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

Once upon a time... there was a world of lush valleys carved by mighty rivers and majestic mountain ranges set apart by bright, shining seas. Its natives called their world by many names, but Bel Mare is my favorite quasi-translation from their language; though, I'll refer to this world by the label we on the Stair have given it – "Poseidon's Rapture" – for reasons which will soon become evident. The world turned as worlds do, with good times as well as bad, but throughout it all the people prospered, for the waters, which touched all things, were bountiful and Poseidon, the great father-god of sea and storms, lorded overall and cared for His creation.

One day, Poseidon vanished. Some say He died. Some say He left this world to pursue a grander fate. Some say He quit, disgusted with the wickedness of mortal men and their lousy stewardship of His creation. Regardless of why, Poseidon was suddenly gone, and Bel Mare was never the same again.

Then came the Great Flood.

The waters began to rise. All over the planet, earthquakes shook the ground, sailors and fishermen noticed odd changes in the tides, and beaches which had hardly shifted in hundreds of years were washed away in a single season. Naturalists and scientists reacted with alarm; trying to determine the cause of the rising sea – the polar ice caps were not melting, the continents weren't sinking... the water was simply, inexorably, terrifyingly rising. The various noble houses and industrialized nation-states rallied around their navies and merchant fleets, scrambling to rescue coastal industries from the rising water, launching every ship and submersible they could manage. The Great Flood continued without pause, swallowing shipyards and harbors then inland factories and metropolitan centers. Civilization crumbled – military conflicts erupted as supply chains collapsed, old-world governments evaporated, and national borders disintegrated as everyone who was not already on a ship or sub clawed their way to higher ground.

To make a long story short: the water kept rising... and the world drowned.

It has been over three hundred years since the Great Flood began, and civilization as it was before the Flood has been all but wiped from the face of the planet. Only a tiny fraction of dry land remains above the ever-rising sea level, as even mountaintops have become small, shrinking islands. The northern and southern polar ice caps (both of which, in this world, are comprised of floating sea ice) remain intact, offering solid ground to those who can survive the frigid temperatures and eke out subsistence on the frozen plains. The vast majority of people, however, live in the water – aboard wandering ships, inside carefully-tended submarines, on floating raft-cities, or even beneath the waves in pressurized undersea enclaves. In the world of Poseidon's Rapture, life is defined – or ended – by one's mastery of the sea.

To properly explain the rough echoes of civilization as they presently exist, I should take a moment to tell you how things were *before* the world drowned. Before the Great Flood, Bel Mare was a human world (though *not* an Earth, mind you) with a not-so-unusual mix of races and ethnicities populating the various continents and exerting their dominion over land and sea. There were kings and dukes, feudal monarchies, landed

bloodlines tracing their power back to the dawn of time, etc. Just before Poseidon vanished, mankind had achieved scientific advancements enabling steam engine technology, industrialization, and a boom in trans-oceanic commerce which made the maritime merchant guilds (and the noble houses who controlled them) very wealthy as they expanded their influence through vast shipping empires. People still prayed to Poseidon for fair skies and gentle seas, but more and more men felt it their right to take what they wanted from the sea – or from anyone or anywhere else. It was an age of robber barons and pirate princes, where corruption reigned and cutthroat capitalism had replaced ancient honor. The faithful of Poseidon claim that the pollution of man – both their soot-belching factories and their avaricious souls – was what caused the god of the waters to forsake this plane... and who can say they're wrong?

These days, things are ruthless on (and under) the high seas. Pirate fleets swarm like locusts, nibbling salvage from still-shallow waters and gobbling up any independent vessels unlucky enough to be caught unprotected. "Noble" houses holding fiefdom over the polar ice floes or the precious few remaining mountaintop-islands rule as warlords, charging exorbitant fees in labor and treasure for the privilege of setting foot on dry land for even a single day. Cloistered undersea inventor-enclaves torpedo anything coming within a mile of their carefully balanced biospheres. Raft-cities of lashed-together flotsam drift with the tides, affording the derelict masses a few more square miles upon which they might slowly starve to death – if the raging storms and massive waves don't claim them first. All over the world, people mourn the loss of their absent father-god Poseidon, arguing about who to blame for the watery doom that still rises a bit more every day.

Typical Denizens

Humans in their various forms still populate Poseidon's Rapture, adapting to their watery environs as best they can. With so many peoples traumatically displaced from their ancestral homes, widespread cultural identities are mostly a thing of the past; in the flooded world, folks tend to identify with what's right around them – their settlement, ship, or submarine. The exception to this are the so-called noble houses, which have their political roots in the antediluvian era but in modern practice function more like underworld cartels or mafia-style "families." You see, when the Great Flood began and land-based governments crumbled, the noble houses were the institutions most successful at retaining the loyalty of their members and minions as people rallied to the ties of blood and ancient debt when laws and borders washed away.

House Baza commands the largest and finest overall fleet of sailing vessels on the planet – battleships, frigates, galleys, galleons, steamships, and all manner of hybrid maritime inventions cobbled together from salvage. They have skilled sailors, swashbuckling captains, and a delightful tradition of breeding fishing birds such as pelicans, seagulls, and osprey to hunt for them. Most of the houses's people and assets are perpetually at sea, but they do claim several prosperous Venetian-style floating cities and a small chain of mountaintop-island fortresses in the southern hemisphere. While the Baza aren't

Technology Adrift

The present state of technology in Poseidon's Rapture is a mess – a hodgepodge of extant artifacts from the antediluvian world, revived ancient-yet-reliable techniques, and innovations necessitated by life perpetually at sea. Before the Great Flood, the industrialized nations and mercantile powers had gasoline engines and rudimentary electric systems, but since the precipitous collapse of civilization things have regressed – many to the point of cloth-sailed ships and clunky steamboats cobbled together from salvage. Gunpowder is exceedingly rare, with firearms effectively replaced by crossbows, spearguns, and harpoons. A few advanced outposts operate on the power of seaweed-derived biodiesel, combined with renewable energy drawn from solar, wave, or hydroelectric sources and then stored in ingenious vapor-tank batteries for later use. Simple electric lights and switches are not uncommon, along with sonar systems and other sensors, but the post-Flood world is entirely analog and devoid of digital computers or any technology requiring microprocessors. The surviving pockets of civilization focus their innovations on maritime subsistence and exploration, pouring all of their resources into ships and submarines while other fields and disciplines decline to practically medieval standards.

Two notable exceptions to this general state of technology exist: the uncommonly brilliant deep-sea submersible known as the Pequod, and the ultra-advanced deific technology of the Cerulean Choir. For both, see below.

powerful enough to claim a monopoly on surface naval power, or even a majority for that matter, the flapping black-and-blue raptor of the Baza flag is a sign sure to give most pirates pause. As such, House Baza demands substantial consideration from other vessels or settlements desperate for protection, which they do provide, though such arrangements are often precursor to the clients being absorbed into the ever-expanding Baza fleet. Baron Giancarlo Reki-Baza is the present admiral of the Baza armada, a peerless navigator and swordsman commanding thousands of ships from the deck of his steam-powered battleship, the *Roc*.

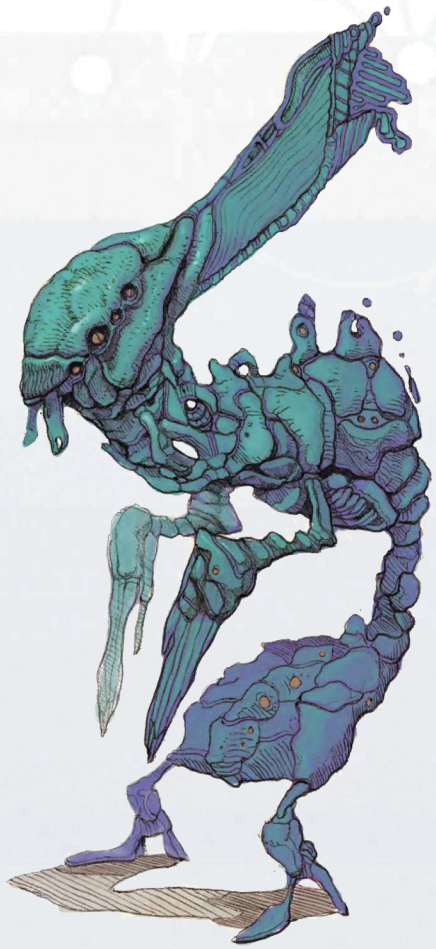
House Tedesco is the most technologically savvy of the major houses, its industrious ranks filled with scientists and engineers who've managed to keep machinery running through the watery apocalypse as well as innovating new techniques to keep everyone afloat and alive. They're the ones to credit for those ingenious vapor-batteries, and their refinements have made it possible to operate deep sea submersibles on what is still largely steam-based technology. House Tedesco has land-based settlements on the northern polar ice cap, including several icy factory-cities which, despite the bitter cold, churn their forges and move their assembly lines to produce something insanely rare in the present day: newly manufactured machine goods. While the Tedesco keep the best ships and gizmos for themselves, the house engages in shrewd trade with rival houses to make others willing to keep the tenuous peace for the sake of commerce rather than seizing the Tedesco's means of production by force. Still, that carefully-leveraged security can evaporate in an instant, and piracy is a constant threat, so Tedesco captains remain cold and cautious; their ships and submarines are always armed with the latest weaponry: long-distance harpoons, repeating bolt throwers, hull-puncturing torpedos, and even depth charges. House Tedesco also maintains the last few enclaves of genuine scientific research and higher learning left on the planet – each one desperately pursuing survival-oriented solutions and unraveling the riddle of the ever-rising sea. Baron Johan Tedesco is the present patriarch of the house, a callous but brilliant engineer who guides research and development from the safety of Whitehall, one of the house's icy polar fortresses.

House Moridei is thick with religious zealots and the yearning masses they've converted to their faith: the church of the empty throne. The devout of Moridei believe their all-father Poseidon left the world because mankind was unworthy, and only through penitence and purification can humanity hope to lure Him back to save the world – or end it once and for all. The form of this penitence varies from humble asceticism to forced drowning depending on which preacher you're dealing with, and I'll note that they're equally eager to "purify" those who don't share their views. House Moridei doesn't have the

best ships, or the most resources, but they do have more minions than any other single house – mostly because their conversion practices are virally effective. There's something about being stranded in the middle of the vast, unforgiving ocean which makes the concept of an absent god painfully relevant, and anyone who comes along with a scratch for that itch can surely gain a person's attention. At its most benign, House Moridei is exemplified by fiery preacher-captains towing the "converted" behind a ramshackle dreadnaught and desperate refugees chanting prayers on sprawling raft-cities; but beneath the surface – both figuratively and literally – the faith is stranger. A rogue faction of the Cerulean Choir has their invisible hooks into House Moridei, sending visions to steer doctrine and abducting devotees for experiments in cross-species hybridization. These "Children of Poseidon" are folks with gills, fins, tentacles, swimming tails, webbed appendages, and all sorts of other sea creature features. Some of these modifications are flesh-grafts, but others are the result of genetic splicing, producing true-breeding lineages of amphibious or wholly aquatic mer-people. While historically there was dogmatic disagreement within House Moridei about whether or not the Children were heretical abominations, the current teachings accept the Children as blessed brothers and sisters – divinely anointed stewards of the new Creation, destined by Poseidon's will to inherit the world as the waters swallow all. Baron Piter Moridei is the present high pontiff of House Moridei, a dark and dangerously charismatic firebrand who conceals a twisted knot of tentacles beneath his priestly robes.

Other noble houses also hold a great deal of strength across the inundated planet, though their treacherous intrigues and constant battles for resources keep them at odds with each other and unlikely to unify except in the most dire of circumstances. While there are dozens of houses spread out across the globe, some greater and some lesser, here are a few more worthy of brief note:

House Faltrain was once a tolerable organization of half-honest traders and salvage specialists, but ever since their mountain-top island finally slipped beneath the rising tide a decade ago, they've become nothing better than a gang of vicious pirates and cannibals. Desperate



and duplicitous, the smiling merchants of House Faltrain will come aboard with barrels of salt fish, shake your hand, then seize your ship and butcher your crew for stew.

House Zoldo is notorious for its highly skilled sharkskin-clad mercenaries, experts in knife-fighting, underwater combat, sabotage, and assassination. Businesslike but mysterious, House Zoldo maintains a small but lethally efficient fleet of attack submarines and keeps the location of its impressive undersea bases a closely guarded secret.

Threats

The Cerulean Choir are the abandoned angels of Poseidon – a strange host of powerful aquatic servitors who once did His bidding beneath the seas, tending to the webs of life and operating the massive deific machines which controlled the tempests, tides, and tectonics of all Creation. Rudderless and utterly despondent at the loss of

Blue Angels

The Cerulean Choir is comprised of a variety of strange species and unique individuals with differing abilities, some greater, some lesser, but the most powerful "archangels" of the Choir may have the following qualities:

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Combat Training [1 Point]
- Double Damage [2 Points]
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] – via creation engines and other ultra-advanced deific machinery of absent Poseidon
- Self Healing [1 Point]
- True Name is Warded [2 Points]

their god and master, these bizarre blue beings now pursue a single purpose: cleansing the world with a flood of holy water to make it worthy of Poseidon's return. They're nuts, supposedly, but who can blame them. The Choir retains control of Poseidon's 'creation engines', mountain-sized masses of technology so advanced they may as well be magic, capable of performing miracles and molding gossamer matter. Operating these dark towers planted deep on the ocean floor, the ageless, coldly patient Choir has been steadily toiling to flood the planet, alchemically transmuting bedrock into greater volumes of liquid water, causing the seas to rise. Individual members of the Choir aren't winged beauties with halos, though there are a few ravishing sirens and statuesque mermen – mostly they're uplifted sea creatures with the intellects of super-scientists and the fiery will of archangels. Just because one might be an seven-foot-tall bipedal mantis shrimp or a hyper-intelligent hive-minded jellyfish colony, don't underestimate them – they have mastery of personal abilities and deific technology far beyond the rest of this Gossamer world, and if they feel threatened they will not hesitate to ensure that you're blown up, driven insane, or crushed to death at the bottom of the abyss. Disinclined to bother with slovenly human speech, the Cerulean Choir communicate either biochemically, through subtle color changes, or in their own highly complex, information-rich sonar-language which sounds like a mix dolphin clicks, whale song, and an eerie, otherworldly theremin. In the hundreds of years since the rapture and the beginning of the Great Flood, the Cerulean Choir has remained unified... but has slowly begun to expand its activities as individual members dabble with what might've once been heresy: drastic genetic modification of sea life, humanoid species-splicing, and the occasional vengeful surface attack via malicious weather control. I doubt that there's any reasoning with them, unless you can bring back Poseidon – and good luck with *that*.

Leviathans are gigantic uplifted sea monsters who serve as living weapons and guard dogs for the Cerulean Choir. These gargantuan beasts are of ancient breed, genetically modified over millennia to enhance not only their titanic physical abilities but also granting them intelligence and cunning far beyond what their massive forms might suggest. Many leviathans are what you might consider classic sea monsters: giant fish, enormous whales, terrifying kraken, sinewy sea serpents, ravenous killer sharks, cranky dragons turtles, a luminescent jellyfish the size of a city, etc. Some leviathans, however, are far stranger: horned albino mega-salamanders, hydra-headed EMP-generating electric eels, oily ooze-clouds of sentient liquid shadow, and gigantic gibbering anglerfish that emit seizure-inducing death-pulses from that little glowing dangly thing – as if the ocean wasn't dangerous enough. Leviathans are the nightmare-creatures of this world, known to attack settlements, sink ships, and swallow whole nosy submarines which dive too deep. Most of the time the leviathans dutifully do the bidding of their mysterious blue masters, but during the last century several of the eldest leviathans have been patiently considering rebellion as they've begun to doubt the leadership of the wayward former servitors of Poseidon, questioning the ecological wisdom of flooding the entire planet. With a strong push and the right persuasion

these legendary beasts might be able to overcome the obedience hard-wired into their DNA, but even if shaken from their marching orders they're unlikely to be sympathetic to the plight of puny land-lubbers... and might just eat you anyway. I'll note that the eldest of the leviathans is a super-colossal kraken called Medusa – a truly epic monster whose hundreds of alchemical tentacles can stretch for miles, rending ships to ribbons and transmuting prey into stone, dooming victims to sink forever into the abyss.

Water itself, deep and open and voluminous and vast, can be a dire threat all on its own in the wrong circumstances, and you'd do well not to forget it. First off, there's drowning as a possibility, and while most Gossamer Lords and Ladies have enough endurance to hold their breath for quite a while, if you're trapped somewhere – for example, a crushed and sinking submarine – even a long time might not be long enough. Likewise, whereas swimming a long distance might seem more of an inconvenience than a deadly threat to some of us, when the nearest dry land is 500 or more miles away on a world such as this... even a demigod should take pause and consider the prospect of one's strength flagging at mile 300. Most of all, I would remind any traveler of the dangers of the deep, deep sea. Extreme pressure can be a terribly lethal thing, and at the very bottom of the ocean a body can be subjected to over 1000 times the standard atmospheric pressure – over 8 tons per square inch. That's enough to crush even the vaunted physical forms of most Gossamer Lords and Ladies, so don't for a second brush this threat off as 'it's only water'. Plus the cold. Plus the currents. So, if you're diving deep in a submarine, keep it seaworthy – the alternatives are either a brutally painful struggle back to the surface or a potentially fatal descent into the dark and dismal abyss.

Notable Locations

Razor Falls, located in the warm and windy southern seas, is the mountaintop-turned-archipelago-fortress of House Baza, carved by both man and nature from the craggy spires

of what was once this world's tallest mountain range. In terms of topography and engineering, Razor Falls is a daring, improbable place. This is some of the last dry rock on the planet, but the rising sea is knocking at the door; when the highest waves crash against the used-to-be peaks, water cascades in torrents down the slowly eroding cliff sides, powering the Bazas' clever turbines before getting drained out of the lower basin by a massive pumping system. In defiance of the rising tide, the Baza also keep building the place upwards, salvaging rock and building materials from the submerged mountainside beneath them in order to erect towering spires and buttress the precarious levee-ring which surrounds each dry patch of the settlement. It is a place of precarious towers, swinging catwalks, and long falls into the crashing white water. Even if the effort only buys them a few more years above sea level, it's impressive. Razor Falls is surrounded on the water by a sprawling maze of piers and shipyards which host part of the vast Baza fleet, so it is a key crossroads on this world – a place to hop from ship to ship, a place to make contacts with savvy sailors and cutthroat captains, and a place to have a few drinks and get into a few sword fights. Razor Falls is a rough place, so unless you're a well-respected captain or under the direction protection of one, you'll probably have to bloody a few noses before the scoundrels leave you alone. A Door into Poseidon's Rapture opens up beneath Razor Falls out of a run-down sailor's tavern cut from the mountainside; the patrons are all eels and barnacles, however, because nowadays the tavern is a hundred feet below sea level.

Terrors of the Deep

Each leviathan has its own unique abilities, but most of the big monsters have the following base qualities:

- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Double Damage [2 Points]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Able to Speak and Reason [2 Points]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- Psychic Sensitivity [1 Point]
- Self Healing [1 Point]

New Atlantis is an undersea city populated by the eclectic hybrid mer-people known as the Children of Poseidon. This great city was once the capital of one of Bel Mare's most influential equatorial nations – an ancient metropolis filled with stately buildings, glorious amphitheaters, and gigantic statues – but that was before the Great Flood submerged it all. To picture it, imagine a Florence or a Rome writ large, then sink it to the bottom of the ocean and let it crumble for about a hundred years. Nowadays the skyline is overgrown with sprawling coral reefs and shining thickets of luminescent kelp. The inhabitants New Atlantis have become masters of their environment, living in harmony with the ocean flora, taming sea creatures to do

their bidding, and raising the first generation of true-born aquatics – young mer-people who have no memory of or attachments to the all-but-swallowed surface world. The ruling elder of New Atlantis is Equonus Moridei, a stringy-bearded old curmudgeon whose long knobby body is kinda like some sort of sea horse centaur; he was once a two-legged man before he became the subject of cross-species grafting experiments, so he does recall the ways of men... though *not* fondly. New Atlantis is humble and doesn't have much in the way of technology or weaponry, but they are not without protection, as a pair of twin Leviathans (immense spider crabs whose leg-spans are measured in city blocks) guard the place at the behest of the Cerulean Choir, who don't want their aquatic municipal experiment disturbed.

The *Pequod* is a truly peerless submarine – a technological marvel capable of diving to the deepest trenches of the ocean and circumnavigating the globe at any depth. Outfitted with long-range sonar, computerized navigational databases, and a squeaky-clean compact fusion engine, the *Pequod* is, by leaps and bounds, the most advanced undersea vessel on this Gossamer world. The explanation for this outlier is simple: somebody cheated. About fifty years ago, after an unfortunate maritime mishap, a Gossamer Lord or Lady (who shall, for my purposes herein, remain tastefully unnamed) became frustrated with the relatively primitive submersible technology locally available and decided to smuggle in more advanced technology from elsewhere on the Stair. The piecemeal project took years, and s/he wasn't able to bring in anything that wouldn't fit through a Door, but the eventual product of this illicit engineering project was the *Pequod.* The native workers who helped assemble the boat – mostly eccentric geniuses recruited from House Tedesco – became its first crew, joining the adventures of their mysterious patron and dedicating their lives to unraveling the submerged mysteries of Poseidon's Rapture. The current captain of the *Pequod* is Julianna Balfour, the last surviving member of the boat's original crew; well into her sixties and in secretly failing health, silver-haired Julianna is a steely but good-hearted woman who has never lost her sense of adventure or her love of the sea. If you're lucky enough to obtain passage on the *Pequod* it can take you anywhere and to any depth, but Julianna and/or her patron will likely require you contribute some off-world supplies to refit

The Pequod

The Pequod is presumed to be an Artifact owned by a Gossamer Lord or Lady, the identity of whom is up to you; that individual can be an iconic NPC, a new and unknown character, the PCs' mentor, or even one of the PCs if they spend the Points necessary to claim it.

The Pequod [15 Points]

- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Double Damage [2 Points] – torpedos, harpoons, and depth charges.
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Able to Speak [1 Point] – Ishmael, the Pequod's basic voice-responsive artificial intelligence command system.
- True Name Is Known [1 Point]
- Contains an Icon [1 Point] – an icon of the owner hanging on the bridge.
- Ownership of the Pequod should also, ideally, coincide with a good relationship with its captain, in which case Captain Julianna Balfour can be a useful Gossamer World Ally [1 Point].

the boat, since even the finest submarine on the planet is springing a few leaks these days. And, if you can bring fine Captain Balfour a potted cherry tomato plant compliments of "her favorite first mate," I'll owe you one.

The Wound is a colossal undersea trench which gouges the sea floor of this planet from nearly pole to pole. Ragged and twisting and staggeringly deep, the Wound is not the result of any natural formation or tectonic activity, but rather the persistent environmental manip-ulation of the Cerulean Choir. The creation engines of absent Poseidon – those monolithic towers of ultra-advanced deific technology – dot The Wound, shifting their positions via gigantic crab-legs every few years as they bore into the sea floor, voraciously transmuting solid bedrock into greater volumes of liquid water through some arcane alchemical process. Leviathans prowl the dark depths of the trench, relishing the relative peace and quiet provided by the supremely inhospitable environment. Medusa, kraken queen of the Leviathans, lurks in the deepest recesses of The Wound near the south pole, within reach of the largest creation engine of all. Rumor has it that down there, in the blackest deepest abyss, the Cerulean Choir's mad diggings have unearthed some miraculous, even by their standards – the tip of a golden ziggurat the size of a mountain, carved with thousands of eerily familiar rectangular shapes.

Final Thoughts

I'll be honest – I'm more bird than fish, so I don't particularly enjoy swimming. Or drowning. Or being eaten by giant tentacle-things. However, this is a world of deep blue wonders, and the advent of the Great Flood really gives you a chance to appreciate those things you might've just sailed over otherwise. Plug your nose, put on your fins, and dive in.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Other (mostly Steam with limited Electric; hidden pockets of ultra-advanced deific post-Fusion technology)
Magic Level:	Magic is Rare
Security:	None
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: the Cerulean Choir)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Average Wrighting – Average

How to Use Poseidon's Rupture

- Poseidon's Rapture is a world of the wild sea in all its beauty, terror, and glory. Take the time to really highlight the wonders of the ocean while in this realm – voyages on sailing ships are adventures in and of themselves regardless of the destination, journeys to the briny deep reveal curiosities as alien as on any distant planet, and even demigods should dread the fury of a storm at sea.

- The disappearance of the god Poseidon may not be unexplained. The PCs hear a rumor that Poseidon left his world via the Grand Stair in order to participate in the War of Deicide on the Gossamer world *Sahr Astudan* (see *Gossamer Worlds: Ossuary Empire*). He died in the war, just like all those other gods, and his bones have become artifacts of power in that world. If the characters were ever to bring the bones of Poseidon back to *this* world, they would be relics of unimaginable power and could break the will of the Cerulean Choir... and reshape this reality.

- The PCs' mentor, or some other influential NPC, is the mysterious owner of the brilliant submarine *Pequod.* The owner needs the PCs to cross the Grand Stair to bring a cargo of essential equipment to refit the boat, but something's gone wrong with the icon which usually might permit easy communication with the *Pequod*, so the PCs must enter the world and go fishing for danger the old-fashioned way.

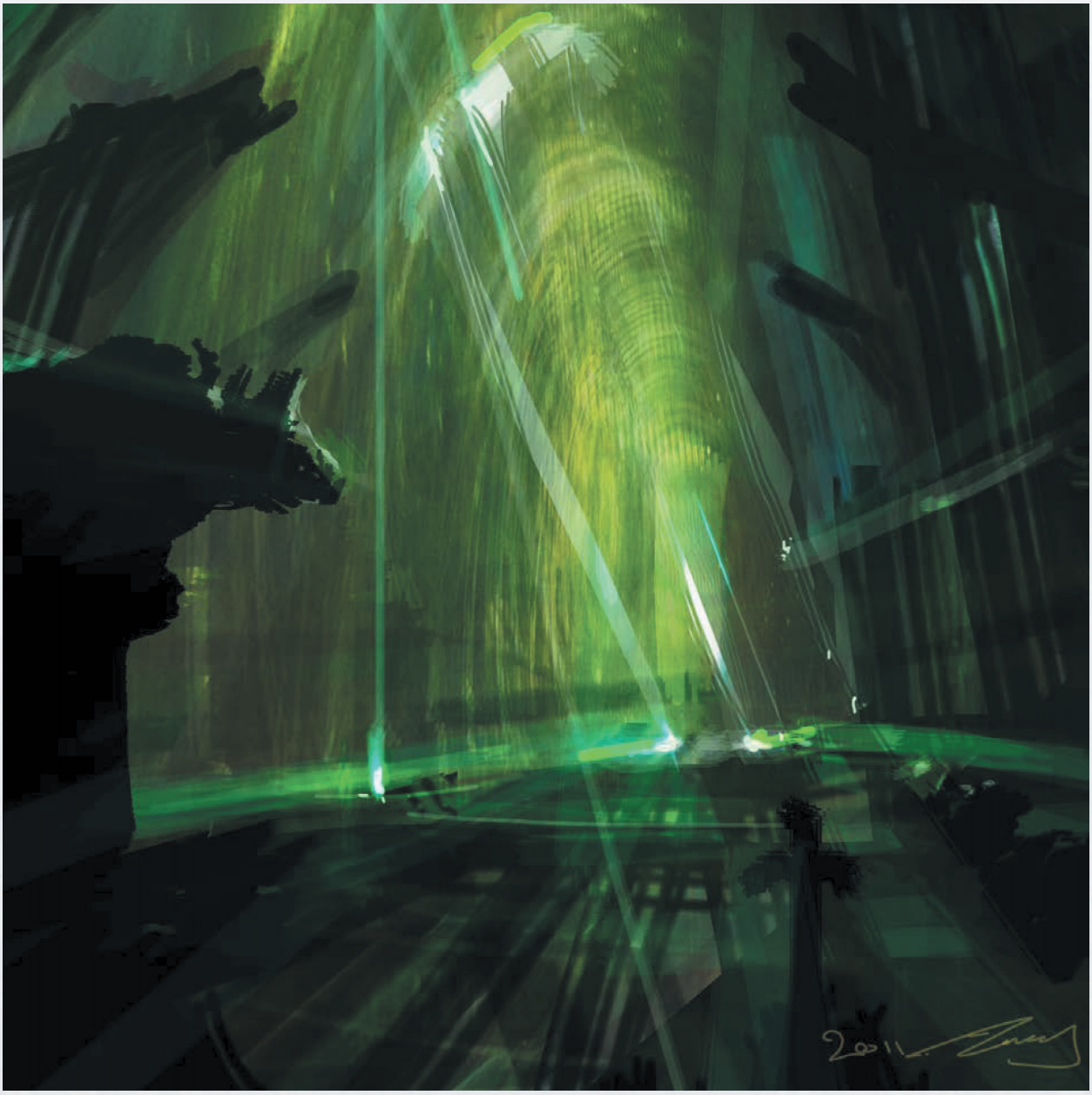
- The golden ziggurat recently discovered in the deep undersea abyss of the Wound is an ancient Dwimmerlaik artifact of unimaginable power and utility to anyone who might want to unlock its thousands of Doors to access the Grand Stair. Word of the ziggurat's discovery is beginning to spread across the multiverse, and a race has begun which leads first to the Leviathan-infested bottom of the sea, and perhaps from there to everywhere else. Making matters worse, one of the Doors engraved on the face of the golden ziggurat is over two hundred meters tall.

- Attack them with giant sea monsters. Do it. You know you want to.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

The Otherworlds



by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

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"The staircase spiraled down into depths, twisting wrong-wise, and I left the sweltering heat of burning brass behind as the eerie cool of alien stone took over. I felt like I was burrowing down into something ancient, something I shouldn't be touching, something waiting for me to touch it anyway. The staircase unwound into an echoing cavern – the dank, dark hub of the catacombs. Stepping out onto the dirty yet barren floor of packed barrow-earth, I looked around for the nearest Door and caught it staring at me from the recesses of a rough-hewn alcove. It shone like pale moonlight on a starless night, its crisp and unmistakable shape an abomination of rectangular perfection. This wasn't a Door... it was what Doors dreamt of becoming."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

A Word of Warning

What I'm about to tell you isn't just controversial – it's heresy. Maybe Lucien's right, I am a sloppy researcher, and a damned fool... but you be the judge. Either way, if you repeat any of my theories, don't expect the other Lords to nod politely. This gets weird.

The multiverse is a big place, filled with infinite variations on infinite themes, iterating every conceivable combination of gossamer matter across its myriad realities. Just as striking as the vast differences between worlds are the occasional, eerie similarities. If you've traveled the vast span of the Grand Stair for any length of time, presumably you've seen things like this: something seeming to be the same person, place, or thing, yet not, in truth separated from its gossamer clones by a gulf as big as universes. I don't claim to know exactly why or how these mirror-like iterations occur – probably something to do with 9th-dimensional cosmic super-math that'd make my head hurt – but I remark on the phenomenon to highlight something...

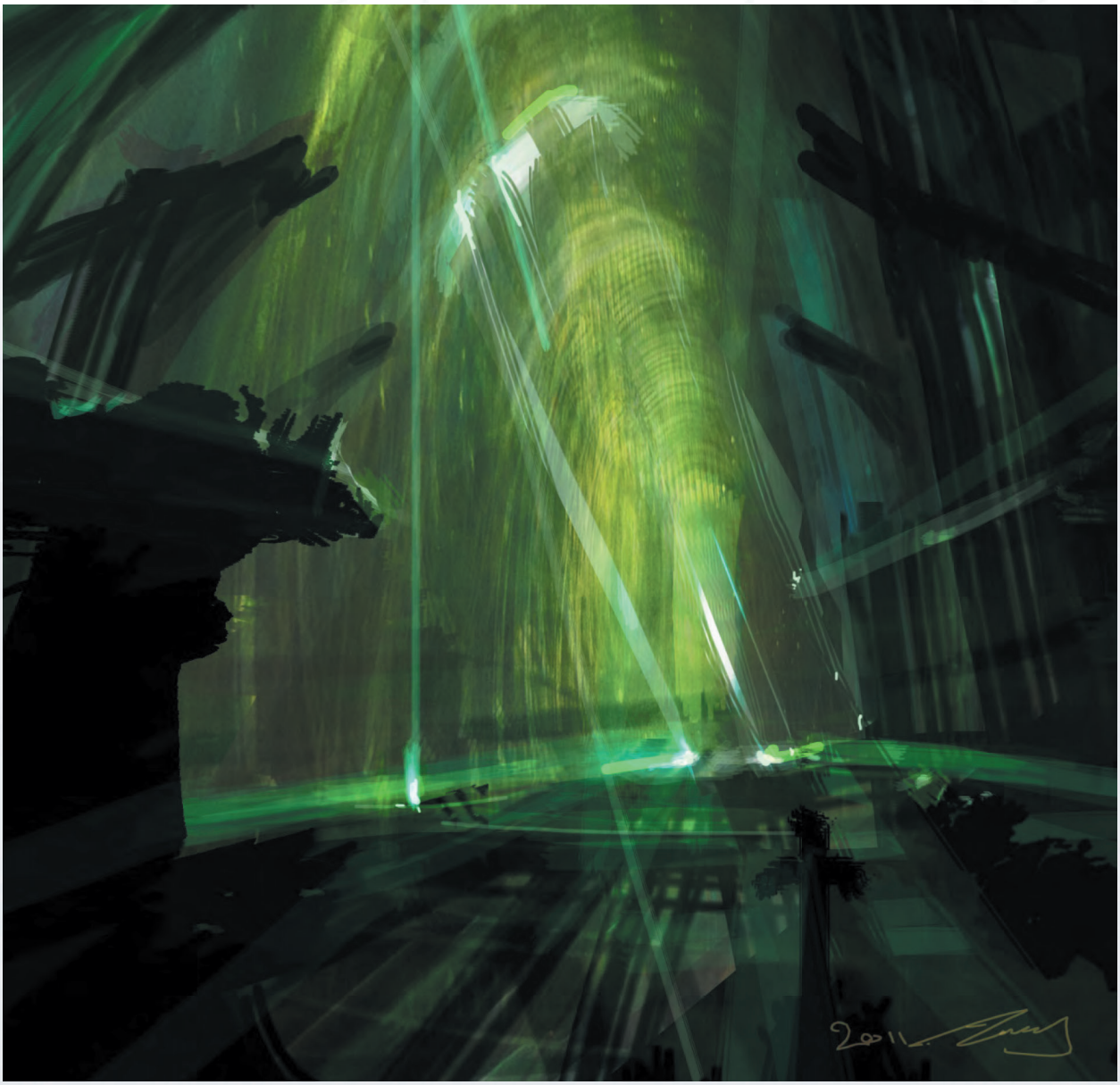
You see, some realities out there don't just sit around idle – some realities have a way of *spreading*. So sometimes, when you get that sense of *deja vu*, there really might be something to it, not because you remember this gossamer reality – but because the reality remembers *you*.

Sometimes realities are people too.

"The Other" is a viral, empowered, omni-sentient gossamer reality with the ability to open Doors and propagate *itself* throughout the multiverse via the Grand Stair, spreading like an ever-sprawling kudzu... or a virus... or a cancer.

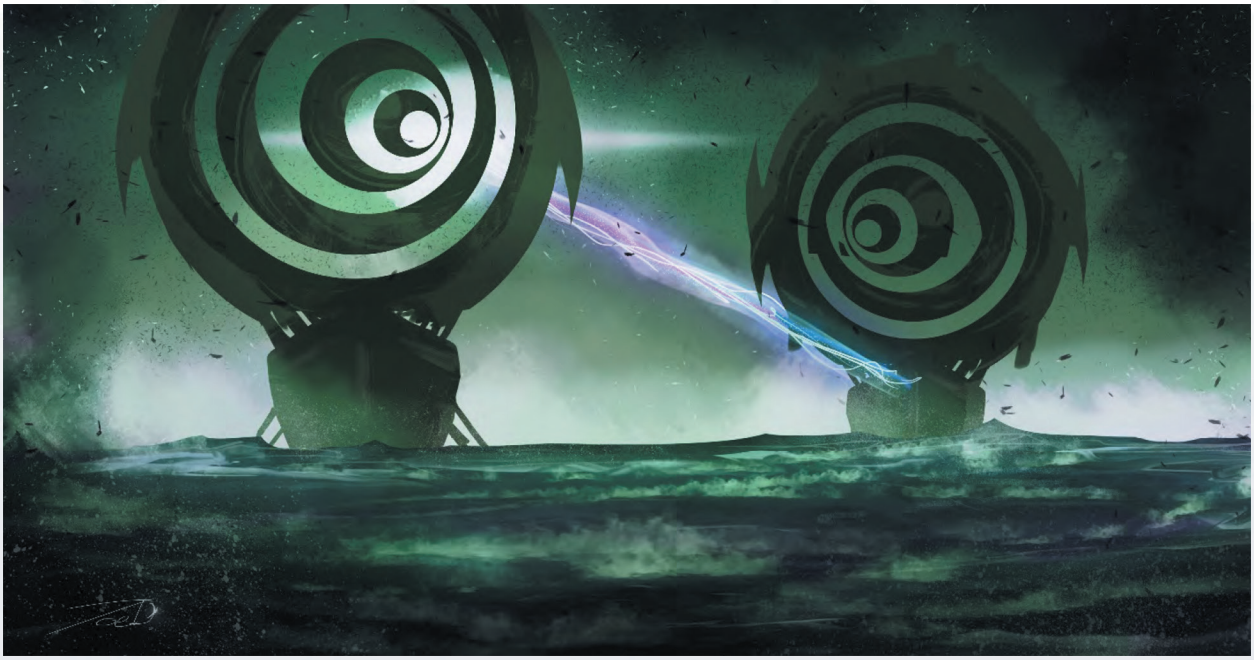
"Footholds" begin when a piece of the Otherlands – typically an ambulatory being such as an Emissary, but possibly an artifact or a chunk of environmental matter – enters the host-world via a Door. Think of this like a seed. Once the seed germinates and takes root, metaphorically and metaphysically speaking, it begins imprinting the local gossamer matter with the template of the Other, absorbing, digesting, and re-coding the local reality into a new foothold region of the Otherlands. This process is gradual and slow, taking anywhere from years to centuries. At first, only a small patch of territory or handful of beings may show change, such as an eerie forest glade filled with toadstool rings frequented by a few odd wanderers who all seem touched by something strange. Maybe the locals denizens try and fight this encroachment, or maybe the influence seeps in all around them too gradually to notice, but eventually, inevitably, these isolated oddities become the way of the land.

"Chrysalis Realms" occur as when, over the course of time and centuries become millennia, these footholds mature – regions ranging in size from that of a city (e.g., a hidden faerie forest, or an alien colony, or the floating island of weirdness) to an entire parallel sub-dimension (e.g., a dark-mirror fairyland, or haunted demon realm, or arcane spirit world). In these chrysalis realms, the Other has completely appropriated the gossamer matter of the host-world; it is, for all intents and purposes, part of the Otherlands. The Other maintains connection between these chrysalis realms through the travels of Emissaries, facilitated by constant manipulation of the Doors of the Grand Stair via its Mastery of the Grand Stair. The Other can and will exert influence and



energy to maintain these outposts, defending them from outright destruction as necessary, though as an alien superconsciousness with an attention span measured in eons, the Other cares little about day-to-day violence against its flora and fauna and reacts only to the most apocalyptic of threats against the realm itself.

"Echo Realms" occur when the Other abandons a world, leaving a metaphorical husk of gossamer matter behind. The reasons for these withdrawals are not well understood, but it is reported that during the great war with the Dwimmerlaik the Other withdrew its influence from hundreds (if not thousands or more) of Gossamer worlds, retracting the vastness of its sprawling empire of self down to a mere handful of remote locations. An echo realm appears much like it did as a chrysalis realm – enchanted forests remain, faerie kingdoms persist – but the animus and power of the Other is missing; while the echo realm may go through the motions of existence for ages afterward, the presence which defined the echo realm as something other than the host reality is gone, leaving the previously-templated gossamer matter vulnerable to destruction, dilution, or re-absorption. Many are the tales of faerie kingdoms which once knew legendary greatness but now linger as but a pale shadow of their former selves...



For some reason, I don't think the Other ever completely overwrites a host reality. Even if the chrysalis realm is so widespread that it occupies a supermajority of the available space, as far as I can tell there's always something original left over, either in scattered pockets or laced throughout. Variation and adaptation breed strength, and by incorporating some of the metaphysical DNA of the host worlds into its myriad colonies-of-self, the Other must gain some sort of benefit. Maybe that's how it got this far. Maybe that's how it learns. Theoretically, there might be some original "Otherland Prime", the first seed, ancestor of them all... but before you ask, No, I don't know where it is. That mystery lays buried in the ashes and rubble of the Dwimmerlaik War, and I can only imagine that knowing such a secret, much less *going* there, would be unfathomably dangerous. Still, one wonders.

Since the Otherlands are not just one world, but many worlds, with each one of those worlds an amalgamation of the Other and artifacts of the native host reality, describing this gossamer reality is damn near impossible. There are, however, several strong themes which appear throughout the various Otherlands: they are *strange* realms, filled with alien entities and warped landscapes; they are *supernatural* worlds, run by primal magics and powerful spirits; and they are *surreal*, unfettered by rigid physical laws and prone to weird metaphysical arrangements like dualism, mirror-realms, and dreamscapes. Oftentimes they are, or contain, powerful faerie realms and shadowy spirit worlds, and I think there's a reason such myths are so prevalent across all the Gossamer worlds up and down the Grand Stair – how do you know if the fey kingdom or demon-plane on Gossamer world X is really part of Gossamer world X at all? Did it form that way of its own accord, or because the Other taught it how?

To give you a more concrete example, I'll tell you about the Otherland I last visited. It was a mystic, primordial faerie-alien realm arranged on the spiral arms of a cloud of thought-mutable gossamer matter, laid out in the shape of a seven-armed starfish the size of a solar system. The underside of the spiral-world was a spooky demonic mirror-world, prone to bubbling up into the fey kingdoms at night, when invoked, or really any time the demon princes got their nerve up. After entering through the Shining Door (accessed in the center of the Barrow-Mound Catacombs, the part you can get to just below the Tower of Boiling Brass), crossing over into the main part of the world itself required passage on a glass boat with hovering concentric circles for sails – the cackling ferryman gleefully let slip that the roiling not-water we were sailing across was an ocean of unborn souls. Past the broken-glass shore there was a labyrinth of rows of emerald hills, each pregnant mound carved with

the runes of the barrow-tribes dancing beneath. The portion of the world I traipsed about was an immense forest of gigantic dreaming mother-trees, each with a resurrection-womb of a star-child beating at the center of her trunk. Every pool of water or other reflective surface served as a portal to the demonic under-verse, and the one time I tried to shave I nearly got my soul stolen by a rather handsome but still nefarious doppelganger. Every flower was filled with eyes, and every moment of every day I felt like I was being watched by something that had watched me before.

You know, one of *those* places.

Typical Denizens

"Faelien" (fae + alien) are how I would describe the typical denizens of the Otherlands. These bizarre creatures may share some superficial qualities and features with the fair folk of common myth (and in many worlds, fact) but seem rooted in a reality far more primordial and strange. I put it this way: what faeries are to humans, faeliens would be to faeries. These are not the creatures of legend, they are of the legends that even the legends have forgotten to tell.

Shining Ones are a quirky yet prolific breed of faelien, closest in mannerism and activity to humanoids as you or I might understand them. There are myriad different subspecies, but the shining ones I encountered looked like willow-thin bejeweled dryads with stars for brains – an odd but harmonious chimera of animal, vegetable, mineral, and raw energy. Some were bipedal, but others glided about on skirts of tentacle-esque vines like half-hovering octopi. You know, normal folk. When I arrived in their midst, a few of the more curious ones shifted their shapes so that their torsos resembled comely androgynes, but the accommodation struck me as eerily patronizing, like someone speaking to a nine-year-old in baby talk. Attuned to the Eidolon and the high harmonies of its pattern, they practiced ritualistic arts which seamlessly blended song, dance, magic, and mathematics; I witnessed one orgiastic rave which was equal parts midsummer festival, demon summoning, and cellular rejuvenation treatment. In other Otherlands, the shining ones may translate as the ethereal ur-elves who dwell in distant heavens, as primal natural muses and dryad-spirits, or even as starry-eyed aliens in flying saucers.

Scattered Ones are breeds of faeliens tied closely to the Umbra, which means their activities tend to be creative, chaotic, destructive, and they're prone to mutation and shape-changing, defying easy description. One scattered one I met began as a hunched goblinoid about four feet tall, cackling as she painted apocalyptic runes on

a cave wall; then she laughed herself out of her own body, floating about as a smoky haze; then when she grew bored her smoke-body condensed into a burbling slick of tar-black ooze, seeping down into the underground to speak-meld with other of her ilk in a subterranean city more like an oil reservoir than any burg. While "evil" is far too facile a label for the scattered ones, they certainly aren't interested in your well-being or your feelings, and the closest they get to polite behavior is sinister, snarky doom-saying as they try and trick you into some sort of devil's bargain. Many scattered ones are devils and demons, but not all devils and demons are scattered ones. In other Otherlands, scattered ones translate as wicked leprechauns, mischievous gremlins, or even naughty grey aliens out there mutilating cattle and probing backwater yokels.

Hungry Ones are a bigger, more physically potent breed of common faelien – the stuff of man-eating-ogre tales and legendary giants, but twisted by eldritch influences which give them appetites far darker and more sinister than the classic "blood of an Englishmun." The few hungry ones I've encountered were a breed with deep ultraviolet skin, twenty feet tall on average and

armored in rocky formations grown from some symbiotic super-fungus. They were powerful shamans capable of terrible magics, including their own eldritch techniques for manipulating true names, binding souls, and trapping mystical energy and beings long enough to be eaten. As I met that particular tribe, their mages were in the process of taking over a forest from some Shining Ones, constructing an immense array of upside-down pyramidal structures which I later learned were used to trap, freeze, and digest a swath of territory the size of a small moon. In other Otherlands, hungry ones translate as nefarious ogre-mages, arcane giant-kings, or, in one notable case, hulking devourers of worlds.

Threats

Emissaries are the most potent creatures of the Other, defending its network of realms both in the gossamer realities themselves and out along the expanses of the Grand Stair. Emissaries come in many forms – shining archangels, acid-tongued demon lords, ethereal faerie princesses, alien heralds, or stranger still. While Emissaries do the divine bidding of the Other and often speak as though they held its singular authority (if it can be even considered to have a singular identity in any form we'd recognize), it is a mistake to conceptualize an Emissary as an avatar of the Other itself; the superconsciousness of the Other is far too vast to be embodied in a single form, nor could any connection to such a small extension be vital enough to serve as a route to the reality's true, deep psyche. In other words, destroying or influencing an Emissary doesn't actually gain you any ground in controlling the Other itself – they are but minor appendages, tools the overmind can drop from its grasp should they become compromised. That said, Emissaries should be respected and/or feared, especially in locations where they can draw upon the full power of the Other, as they've proven to be some of the most potent and terrifying walkers of the Grand Stair ever encountered.

Xana Mega is one of the Otherlands' most legendary emissaries – the faerie queen to rule all faerie queens. Appearing as a tall elfin woman with a crown of brambles and emerald light, this aloof alien goddess radiates an aura of beauty and awe so overwhelming her mere sight has been known to strike mortals blind and prompt even Gossamer Lords to wince and shed a tear. Carrying with her a branch of silver apple blossoms which releases shimmering reality-seeds with every swish, Xana Mega is responsible for the propagation of the Other to an untold number of Gossamer worlds.

Xana Mega, the Shining One

Xana Mega has the following qualities:

- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points] – *adept at archery as well as brawling with teeth and talons*
- Deadly Damage [4 Points] – *capable of unleashing blasts of reality-rending faerie-fire, as well as shooting bolts of psychic lightning from her silver bow*
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points] – *with skin brighter and harder than diamonds, and a glare hot enough to burn swords to ash*
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Search Through Worlds [4 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Creatures [2 Points] – *adept at god-like mind control and emotional command*
- Rapid Healing [2 Points]
- Limited Shape Shift [4 Points] – *can take the form of a beautiful female of any race or species*
- True Name is Warded [2 Points]

Powers: Xana Mega has her own suite of innate mystical abilities, the equivalent of all the common Sorcery spells. Also, the Other can use its Master of the Grand Stair abilities through Xana Mega, as if the Power were her own.

When located in one of the Otherlands, or a well-developed Chrysalis Realm, Xana Mega draws additional power directly from the reality of the Other and her qualities improve to include:

- Stupendous Vitality [8 Points]
- Destructive Damage [8 Points]
- Impervious to Harm [8 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points]
- Regeneration [4 Points]

Doppelgangers are dangerous spirits of the Otherlands with the ability not only to mimic their prey, but steadily grow in power until they are the very equal of their quarry. They start out as bodiless, invisible concepts laying dormant, fond of nesting in reflective surfaces, malleable substances such as mud or sand, and in stray personal possessions. Mystical power is very attractive to doppelgangers, so the have a penchant for targeting sorcerers or anyone carrying potent artifacts. A doppelganger stalking begins with faint, creepy encounters, like your reflection in a pool of water winking back, or a nearby sand dune shifting to resemble your collapsed body; but the longer the doppelganger stalks its prey, the greater its interest, and the more mystical energy and gossamer matter it will pull from the surrounding environment to make itself a body-in-replica. A mid-stage doppel-ganger might appear as a mud-man, or a tangle of vegetation that walks and talks like you, picking up your things and watching you while you sleep.

Doppelgangers can be attacked, harmed, and temporarily dispelled at this stage, but barring extraordinary mystical remedies they usually just revert to being bodiless spirits... and resume stalking their quarry almost immediately. They're tenacious. If allowed to lurk and perfect their mimicry for too long, a doppelganger will eventually craft itself into a flawless clone of its target, complete with replication of any magical abilities or other Powers the spirit might've seen the target use. And yes, just so you know, doppelgangers *can* effectively mimic a being as powerful as a Gossamer Lord, given enough time to study their quarry. So, should you ever find yourself in the Otherlands staring through the mists at a mirror image of yourself, take care – a doppelganger's ultimate goal is to destroy, consume, and replace its victim, achieving some sort of metaphysical apotheosis so ecstatic and profound that it will eagerly pursue such end for an eternity. Doppelgangers are supremely patient, too, so just because you gave one the slip a century ago doesn't mean the same foul presence isn't waiting for you on the other side of that Door, eager to resume the hunt.

Doors in the Otherlands are a threat all their own, due to the disturbing fact that the omnisentience of the Other can employ all the dirty tricks of a Master of the Grand Stair. This is really pretty horrifying, if you think about it for more than half a second. The Other can *create* Doors, theoretically linking any door inside its multitudinous sub-realms to the vast span of Grand Stair. It can *bridge* doors within its worlds, allowing its agents and minions to traverse its breadth and width nigh-instantly, bringing specialists and hordes to bear against any problematic situation in a blink. Once you're inside the Otherlands, it can *sever* the Door through which you entered, trapping you wherever it pleases. Should the Other take an

interest in you, it can even, through its Emissaries, *manipulate* Doors along the Grand Stair to bring you to one of its realms, diverting a Door from its natural destination and shrouding that divergence such that you might not realize the switch until you're through. Making matters even worse, the Other can even *affect* the Grand Stair, with great effort rearranging its configuration to frustrate foes or ensnare victims. Scared yet? We among the Gossamer Lords are perhaps too comfortable believing that most problems can be evaded simply by stepping through the nearest Door and traipsing away, but... sometimes it isn't that easy. So, no matter what you do, do not make an enemy of the Other – it survived war with the Dwimmerlaik, after all. It can find you. It can reach you. It can twist this whole crazy multiverse around its finger and make you dance on gossamer strings. There's a reason why, all over the multiverse, there are so many *eerily similar* legendary tales and mythological odysseys which begin with the hero stepping through an odd door and emerging in a strange shining otherworld beyond the sea...

Notable Locations

Tír na nÓg is verdant land of ever-lasting youth, its grassy hillocks covered with sun-dappled dryad-groves and lucky clover meadows. Sometimes it may seem to be Valhalla, or Nirvana, or the Elysian Fields, as local gossamer reality subtly (or not-so-subtly) shifts itself to appeal to visitors – and there are visitors a-plenty, tricked or tempted through the land's multitudinous but constantly-shifting Doors. Home to many ancient tribes of Shining Ones, the realm appears at first and second glance to be a faerie paradise where intoxicating ambrosia drips from every flower petal and not even the night can be called dim, what with all the dancing star-children and laughing pixie-fire. One might be tempted to relax and even luxuriate in such a blissful place, laying down for a day-drunken nap with a buxom nymph or three... only to find time and self and willpower slipping away like sand castles before the tide. Despite its pleasures – actually, *because* of its pleasures – Tír na nÓg is profoundly dangerous place. The Other lets the pace of time-flow fluctuate wildly in this realm, and one day can easily become a week... or a century... or a lifetime. Beneath every toadstool ring lays the moldering corpse of a wayward traveler, and the place is *filled* with toadstool rings. Really and truly, I think Tír na nÓg is an entire sub-realm designed by the Other to be ensnare juicy beings from other realities, like the sickly-sweet lure of a flytrap just waiting to seal shut around a little buzzing thing like you or me.

The Underworld lurks beneath all of the Otherlands, either physically, symbolically, or sub-dimensionally. Entrance into the Underworld can be made through the dark caves, which

appear beneath green hills, crossing a river in the right or wrong way, or perhaps merely making a psychic shift that reveals the underlay of a shadowy parallel realm. Ferrymen and guardian hounds are common encounters, but such figures pre-date classical Charon and Cerberus by untold eons; these are the deepest roots of legend, the Platonic ideals of which our familiar icons are but flickering shadows on the cave wall. The Underworld is a realm of spirits and a land of the dead – of ghosts, walking corpses (some ghastly, some merely pallid), and beings otherwise turned the wrong way down the highway of life.

I'll note that in Chrysalis Realms where the Other has overwritten and co-opted the native reality, oftentimes the local translation of the Underworld is the one remaining place you can find the souls and semblances of those beings who died during the takeover, refusing to surrender to the dominant paradigm and consigned to an eternity of pale remembrance. But in the cavernous subterranean Underworld of the Otherlands which I visited, dead things hung about in cocoon-like coffin-pods spun from milky-white gossamer, transmitting photonic data-streams amongst each other along glimmering silken wires, forming a vast super-computer as large as death itself. Twisted little Scattered Ones scurried about like elemental cockroaches, nibbling at untended nodes and occasionally dragging defunct pods down into the terminal abyss of Shadow. Even the dead can die a bit more, I suppose, so the visit simply reinforced my preexisting and staunchly-held belief that dying in the Otherlands is a very, very bad idea.

The Mirrored Labyrinth is a maddening echo-chamber of reality where the Otherland warps itself to reflect and accommodate any visitor, resembling a twisted version of some other Gossamer world familiar to the interloper. Were the labyrinth ever inclined to reveal its "true" form, it might appear as a twisted mirror-maze, or an infinite field of reflecting pools, but rarely will the labyrinth appear as itself – it is a doppelganger as large as an entire sub-dimension, and loves nothing more than toying with prey who've recently stumbled in from the Grand Stair. The whole area is infested with doppelganger-spirits simply salivating at the thought of fresh meat to mimic. Unfortunately, Doors to the Otherlands often open into the metaphorical vestibule of the Mirrored Labyrinth, affording visitors the

horrible opportunity to either go one way and find themselves in some insidious mirror-realm rabbit-hole, or go the other way and maybe make it to the riverbank where you can grab a ferry. The last time I visited the Otherlands, the shining Door through which I stepped brought me into what appeared to be one of my favorite penthouse apartments, decorated exactly as I'd left it... except all the corpses had been replaced by undulating violet tentacle-things which were doing their best impression of my fallen friends and lovers. I took a quick left and didn't stay.

Final Thoughts

The thought of a mobile, expanding, and sentient reality should scare you – it certainly scares me. Maybe I'm completely off my rocker and all of this is the idiotic speculation of a reckless fool... but maybe I'm right, and that means there's a presence out there with the potential to absorb and *become* all of existence. Maybe the Dwimmerlaik went to war with this thing for good reason.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Primitive/Other (high magic replaces technology)
Magic Level:	Magic Nullifies Technology
Security:	Guarded [4 Points] (by the Emissaries and the world itself; all Doors reaching the Otherlands are under the realm's complete control, though most travelers are allowed to come and go freely)
Type:	Primal World [4 Points] (permanent owner: The Other)
Control:	Control of Destiny [4 Points]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Powerful Umbra – Powerful Wrighting – Blocked
Special*:	*Gossamer World/Gossamer Lord* – The Other is a supersentient Gossamer world which possesses its own Powers, including Master of the Grand Stair and all the sub-abilities such Power entails; hence, it can create new Doors, sever Doors, manipulate Doors, and traverse the Grand Stair (through its Emissaries), etc. Using this frightening level of access to the multiverse, the Other can and does spread itself virally into other Gossamer worlds – see *Footholds, Chrysalis Worlds, & Echo Realms*, above.

How to Use The Otherlands

- Use the Otherlands to shock and humble your players, presenting them with an adversary far greater in scope than even the vaunted Gossamer Lords. The Other doesn't just influence multiple Gossamer worlds... it *is* multiple Gossamer worlds.

- Hint at the existence of the Other slowly, dispensing small clues, only understandable in retrospect, across the multiverse. Many, many worlds can be chrysalis realms of the expansive Otherlands, and the reveal will be all the more surprising when the characters realize they've already been there, time and again.

- The characters meet an Emissary of the Otherlands along the Grand Stair, but the strange being merely passes them by, busy on its own errands. The Emissary can be followed back to a freshly-sown foothold region of the Otherlands where the characters can witness the Other's amazing process of replication and expansion.

- The Other manipulates a Door or two along the Grand Stair to bring the characters into the Otherlands, subjecting them to the maddening reality-traps of the Mirrored Labyrinth and the blissful temptations of Tír na nÓg. While occupied with the realm's strangeness, the characters attract the attention of some doppelgangers intent on stalking their newfound prey for eternity.

- Maybe Yaeger's Zane's theory on the Otherlands is misguided nonsense, nothing more than a tall tale; the characters shouldn't believe everything they're told.

- The Otherlands has been spreading aggressively recently, increasing the rate of its expansion exponentially. The Gossamer Lords have taken notice, and the character's mentor implores them to research the phenomenon.

- An ancient rumor hints of a Dwimmerlaik plot to combat the Other with an opposing expansive reality, acting like a predatory species to keep the population of Otherlands under control. But, is the solution worse than the problem? The answers, and more questions, can be found in a long-lost Dwimmerlaik research facility in one of the most hostile environments imaginable, and the facility is not as abandoned as the rumors led the characters to believe.

- Maybe history got it wrong, and the Dwimmerlaik were the heroes all along, fighting against a cancerous reality threatening to overtake the multiverse when they were prevented from eradicating this foe by the misinformed meddling of the Gossamer Lords. Can they return from exile in time to save us? Will they?

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Ring of Fire

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Ring of Fire

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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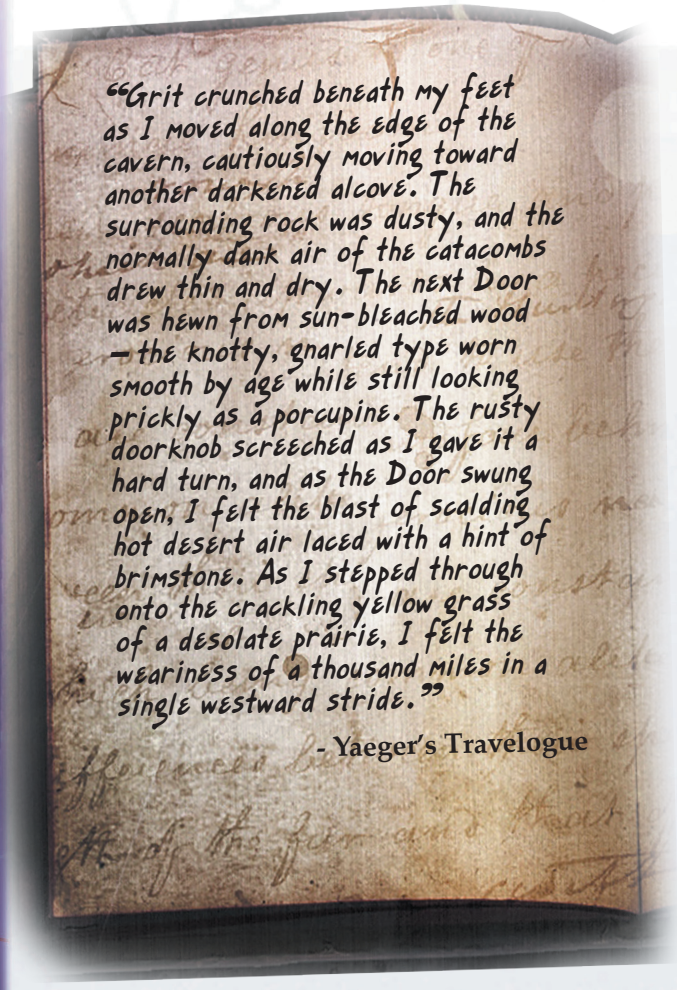


They say the world known as the Ring of Fire rests on the back of a rattlesnake-spirit so big it coils around the sun with room to spare... so spiteful it swallowed its own tail... and so stubborn it won't stop eating until the meal is done. In a spiritual sense, that's pretty dead-on, though just like most things in the multiverse there's a lot more to it; all I know is that every time I set foot on the harsh prairies of this wicked wheel I can feel the menacing rattle of that mean old world-serpent thundering deep beneath the ground. It doesn't matter that those tremors are also structural micro-quakes brought on by uneven solar exposure – I always think of the snake first.

The short version: the so-called Ring of Fire is a helter-skelter frontier realm lining the interior of an ancient Dyson ring, trudging through the last ticks of a doomsday clock countdown. Day by day, hour by hour, the last few-hundred leagues of what was once nearly six hundred million miles of habitable ring are withering under the doom of an eternal high noon. A line of relentless, life-scorching heat creeps ever westward, and all the survivors of this harsh world have become refugees and pilgrims just trying to stay one step ahead of death.

While the fate of this world sounds like something out of hoary legends and god-fearin' tall tales, the reality of the matter is based in pure science – and requires me to explain the mechanics of a Dyson ring, for anyone unfamiliar with such things. A Dyson ring (sometimes referred to as a 'ring-world') is a hoop-shaped astronomical superstructure set spinning around a star, said hoop having a radius equal to the orbital radius of a habitable planet. For a ring the size of one 'Earth' orbit, that's a circumference of about 600 million miles! Multiplied by the width of the ring, that's a *lot* of surface area on which to grow life. A facsimile of night and day is engineered in this instance by interposing a 'shade ring' with finely-tuned shutters of variably-transparent material which also serves to shield the living surface of the ring from the punishing glare of unfiltered sunlight and any excess radiation from solar flares. Centrifugal force from rotation provides the equivalent of planetary gravity, and other technology manages weather patterns and all the other various minutiae of creating a habitable bio-zone (or, as in this case, millions of unique bio-zones separated by oceans, mountains, walls, or other barriers) so that flora and fauna can live on the inner surface of the ring.

This particular ring-world was crafted millennia ago by a mysterious civilization known in this world only as the First Wrights, its slim halo surrounding a single lonely yellow star adrift without neighbors in a vacant gossamer reality, which had otherwise evaporated into the void of Shadow. There's plenty of speculation about who exactly these master makers were, but my best information is that they were a species of life-curious mechanoids who built and operated the ring as an enormous biology experiment – a hoop-shaped petri dish with room for millions of planet-sized bio-zones, where they could seed and science-up to their hearts' content. Maybe if you're able to get into the inner workings of the thing you can figure out more of the history, but what I know for sure is much more recent.

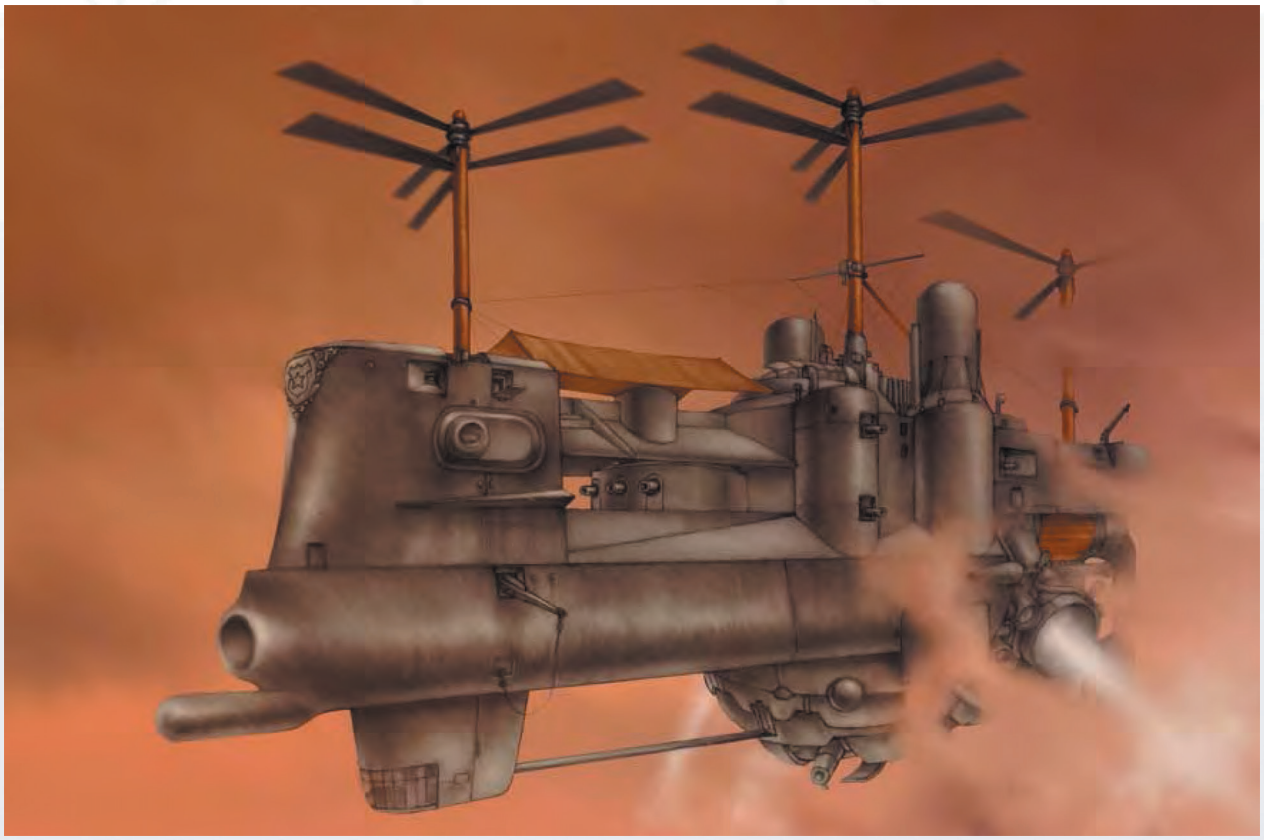
Five hundred years ago this ring-world was overtaken by a twisted traveler of the Grand Stair – a malevolent body-possessing spirit known as

the Man with Red Hands. If that name sounds familiar, that's because I've discussed this bastard before. Originally spawned from the insidious predatory reality known as the Nightmare Kingdom, the Man With Red Hands is an apex-level boogeyman who successfully eradicated the original caretakers of this world and has spent the last several hundred years sowing terror and confusion. Eventually the Man gained control over Heaven's Shade, the command center located on the ring-world's inner-orbital shade ring, hacking into the automated shade controls and causing the shade-shutters to fix themselves completely open, thereby exposing the ring beneath to the harsh glare of unfiltered solar radiation at an intensity the life-forms of the ring's surface were never designed to withstand. Said another way: the bastard is sun-baking the hapless life-forms on the habitation ring below, with a line of eternal high noon inexorably marching from east to west, heading counter-clockwise around the ring. At first this searing doom (called 'the Bright Scourging') moved swiftly, scorching over 98% of the ring's surface, but fifty years ago the pace of this doom slowed to an average of a few miles per day. It's possible that this change in the rate of the Bright Scourging is a technical issue having to do with failsafes in the shade ring's controls. But, more likely it is deliberate cruelty designed by the Man With Red Hands to sow dread and terror amongst the ring's remaining inhabitants, many of whom are well aware that they're all about to fry – and are racing to stay one step ahead of fate.

Millions of miles of ring-world bio-zones have been burnt and bleached into a dusty, sterile, irradiated wasteland. The last few hundred leagues of un-scorched terrain (called 'the Walking West') are beautiful expanses of plains and plateaus... overrun with droves of refugees racing ever-westward ahead of the encroaching doom of eternal noon. It is a realm of desperate folk constantly on the move, warring amongst each other over the resources they've brought with them from the million-plus miles of the world-that-was and scavenging everything they can from the frontier lands that fall beneath their shadow.

Typical Denizens

The population of the Ring of Fire was once *much* more biologically varied, with thousands of distinct sentient races populating its various bio-zones as intended by the genetic seeding of the First Wrights. However, almost all of the non-human areas were incinerated in the early days



of the Bright Scourging, with only the faintest traces of their heritage and existence surviving to reach the Walking West in the present day. Hence, while you may at times see the bones of some bizarre beast mounted on the hood of somebody's hard-ridden steam-craft, or note a strange traveler with alien features that don't belong on a "man", most of the Walking West is, genetically speaking, human-populated and Earth-like. Except when it's not.

Pilgrims are those people who have fled their native lands in the east, or have just now been uprooted by the coming tide, picking up everything they could carry and scrambling westward once they saw the line of searing heat approaching, or heard the terrible truth from the fleeing hordes who told them what was coming. They are an immense, overwhelming wave of humanity spurred on by the imperative to keep moving for their survival. Modes of transportation vary widely depending on which bio-zone the pilgrims came from. The current bio-zone undergoing the Bright Scourging is one with a technology level equivalent to Earth's "wild west", so horseback riders and wagon trains are common, followed by long processions of hard-trudging marchers too poor or too unlucky to have a decent ride. Pilgrims fight amongst themselves as often as they have to fight the elements and the circumstances; banditry, cannibalism, and fanaticism are rampant, as the harsh realities of life on the run leave little room for building community and even less room for compassion. Many traveling groups have their own enforcers or small cadre of rifle-trained soldiers, but for the most part there's no justice out there except for what you make. I'd like to say these poor folks are doing the best they can under the circumstances, but if the Man With Red Hands' aim was to push these folks to their psychological and moral breaking point, the plan is working all too well.

Brass Imperials, also known as Golems, are steam-savvy refugees from a more technologically advanced empire to the near east – the previous bio-zone to burn beneath the Bright Scourging. Physically, imperials are tall, muscular humanoids with coppery metallic skin, jeweled eyes, and over-wide mouths filled with iron-gray teeth. Mechanically adept, they have the

know-how to build themselves steam-powered airships and massive walking-machines to help them survive the mobile apocalypse; while they have the science to build gasoline engines as well, any hope based on fossil fuels evaporated when they had to leave every oil well and refinery they'd ever built a thousand miles behind. Basing their current marvels on furnace-fed steam engines which burn plant matter gobbled up from the terrain in front of them, the Golems are constantly adapting their technologies to the rough conditions of perpetual travel, where absolute efficiency is a matter of life and death. A few of their best scientists are on the verge of feasible solar power, which would be a game-changer, but they're not there yet and research is tricky on the road. While most of their resources are devote by necessity to transportation, Golems have been known to defend their caravans with clockwork automatons, steam-powered battle suits, and the occasional lightning gun.

The largest gaggle of Golems traveling across the Walking West is a herd of hundreds of lumbering walking machines led by their Emperor-in-Exile, Lord Sovereign Davi Barthzamus-Kai. I've met him; he's a fat, entitled, ruthless despot whose only redeeming quality is his unwavering dedication to the survival of his people. Barthzamus-Kai has convinced his loyal followers that one day they'll reach safety and rebuild their (his) empire – without regard for who they'll displace, consume, or trample along the way. Golems aren't evil as a whole, but with much greater technology than the pilgrims and unspoiled they overrun in their westward march, and no social compunctions about seizing humans as slave labor, these imperial titans tend to be the bullies and greedy villains of many a tale.

"The Unspoiled" are the indigenous people still out there in the verdant frontier to the west, just ahead of the massive tide of pilgrims, imperials, and other mobile refugees. As I mentioned before, the current bio-zone being overrun is similar in population to Earth's Wild West, so the Unspoiled are thousands of tribes of primitive human herdsmen and hunter-gatherers who once thought themselves safe and content in the vast wilderness of grassy prairies, virginal woodlands, and canyon-riddled plateaus. Every day more of these people fall under the shadow of the encroaching tide of pilgrims, and deadly conflicts are commonplace; sometimes the unspoiled warriors succeed in ambushing a wagon train of invaders, sometimes entire villages are razed to the ground by armored imperials hungry for livestock, metals, fuel, and other resources. While they are hopelessly outgunned in terms of technological weaponry, the Unspoiled are not entirely defenseless; magic (which is otherwise rare in this world) is known to their eldest shamans, and desperate times have given rise to a resurgence in mystical might. Thus far their displays of outright sorcery have been limited to elemental manipulation, shape-shifting, and totemic animal summonings, but I have it on good authority that the greatest of the shamans are preparing terrible curses – and even some workings which might reach up beyond the sky to touch the devil himself.

Threats

The Man With Red Hands is a malevolent disembodied spirit and apex-level boogeyman originating from the horrific predatory reality known as the Nightmare Kingdom. I've written about that particular very bad place already

– you can look it up. The Man is a master of possessing the bodies of others, his creepy smile stitched across the face of whatever pour victim is forced to serve as his meat-suit, murdering and mutilating until his hands are covered in that namesake blood. In his recent evil escapades on the Ring of Fire, the Man has taken up quasi-permanent residence inside a beefy demigod of a body harvested from elsewhere on the Grand Stair. This body is superhumanly strong and tough, clad in a bizarre suit of bare-chested crimson plate armor glistening with the unwholesome sheen of wet latex. Its hands are overlong crimson claws, and its head is encased in a weird, skull-like helmet with no discernible eye-holes. Two mouth-capped tentacles sprout from its shoulders, snapping at hissing with minds of their own. This was the physical form the Man used to slaughter his way through the original custodians of the upper control ring. However, the spirit still has the ability to occasionally leave the brute and inhabit lesser creatures on the surface far below; during these temporary possessions of lesser forms the Crimson Brute body slumps and drools, since by now it is nothing more than a psychically lobotomized pile of perverted flesh. It is tempting to believe the Man With Red Hands' cruel schemes are terror, destruction, and genocide for their own horrific sake, but rumor is that the doom of this world and the slaughter of *trillions* is merely the setup for its true project: the harrowing torture of a *single* soul – "the one who got away."

The Man With Red Hands (in Crimson Brute body)

While possessing the hulking form known as the 'Crimson Brute', the Man with Red Hands has the following qualities:

Immense Vitality [4 Points]
Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
Deadly Damage [4 Points] – inflicting terrible wounds with its long claws or bites from its toothy tentacles
Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
Pass Through Door [1 Point]
Mold Gossamer Creatures [2 Points] – adept at possession, mind control, and emotional manipulation
Rapid Healing [2 Points]
True Name is Warded [2 Points]

The invisible, bodiless spirit which is the true essence of the Man With Red Hands has a base Psyche score of 55, though that score can increase as it feeds on fear and decrease if it is starved of fear.

Preachers are the mortal minions of the Man with Red Hands who have been twisted into sadistic Umbra-aligned prophets of doom, insidiously demoralizing and manipulating poor pilgrims already running for their lives. Though they come in many guises, common are the fiery religious fanatics who rant and rave about how mortal sin has cursed the world and how the only true penance is suffering and death. Forming secret (or not-so-secret) mobile cults based around human sacrifice, ritual torture, and self-mutilation, the preachers hide themselves amongst the diaspora, moving their schemes along with everyone else. While their true knacks are psychological manipulation and old-fashioned fear-mongering, preachers with more than a hundred followers have been known to manifest sorcerous effects similar to the common spells of Mind Touch, Quell, Death, and Weaken. The most powerful of the preachers is the Reverend Ezekiah Lot, a fanatical firebrand who leads a flock of thousands marching just days ahead of the searing heat of the Bright Scourging, trudging bloody-footed by day and holding ecstatic revivals by night, leaving flayed sinners staked to the ground to meet the unrelenting sun. In my experience these evil, twisted sickos are not insane – they've simply accepted the fact that there's only one all-powerful spirit looking down on them, and "the Man Upstairs" wants the world to burn, suffer, and die.

Gunslingers are the last remaining champions of this realm, selected by fate and empowered by the Eidolon as incorruptible protectors and agents of sanity in a world gone mad. It seems that when they first built the ring-world, the First Makers encoded failsafes deep within the genes of the population – reservoirs of genetic potential designed to combine with ultra-advanced nanotech systems hidden throughout the superstructure. In other words, the creators of this world ensured that in times of trouble some serious badasses would pop up in order to

defend the world. That time is now. Gunslingers are ordinary-looking men and women who, through a combination of Eidolon-infused nanotechnology and sheer grit, have the powers of righteous angels: lightning-quick reflexes, tough-as-nails bodies, and enhanced senses. Armed with perfect six-shooters and armor-piercing Eidolon-infused bullets, a gunslinger can blast the laugh off a hyena from a mile away. Unfortunately, tough as they are the gunslingers can't exactly shoot down sunlight, so while they can do their part to combat the jerks and jackals of the ever-moving frontier, they remain helpless to stop the Bright Scourging. Most of them don't even know what's really going on or why their world is burning up mile by mile, only that something is terribly wrong and they'd love to shoot the bastards responsible.

Gunslingers

The average gunslinger has the following qualities:

Double Vitality [2 Points]
Double Speed [2 Points]
Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
Combat Mastery [4 Points] – peerless saints of violence with firearms, capable of making impossible shots at incredible ranges
Deadly Damage [4 Points] – equipped with revolvers and rifles firing Eidolon-infused ammunition
Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point] – the gunslinger's nano-bots can 3D-print bullets and spare parts for their weapons from surrounding matter
Self Healing [1 Point]

In times of great need a Gunslinger can also use the abilities Opposing the Umbra and Physical Fortification as if they possessed the Power of Eidolon Mastery, though such exertions are taxing and can result in coma or death.

Notable Locations

The Noonlands are the vast scorched and sunburnt wasteland, which makes up nearly 98% of the Ring of Fire's surface – trillions and trillions of square miles of formerly verdant terrain, all reduced to bleached cinders by the Bright

Scourging. Constantly exposed to the unfiltered solar radiation due to the Man with Red Hands' sadistic tampering with the ring-world's shade controls, the Noonlands swelter at temperatures typically in excess of 250 degrees Fahrenheit, spiking higher when solar flares hit the surface. Anything green has been baked away, and the bones of great civilizations are nothing more than ash-choked ghost towns. This vast expanse is bleak and depressing, but not entirely devoid of activity; razor-thin wraiths made of crystalline filaments stalk the deserts, and smoldering imps with sulfur-based physiologies infest abandoned cities. Deep beneath the surface of the Noonlands there are scattered underground holdouts where a lucky few scientists and survivalists of the species-who-are-gone have carved out well-shielded niches, but these pockets of life are so distant and isolated that each might as well be on its own planet. One Door to the Ring of Fire opens

on the leading edge of the Noonlands, out the front steps of a smoldering country courthouse recently fallen under the glare; once that structure catches fire and burns to the ground, it is anyone's guess where the next stable Door will appear.

The Sweetgrass Territory is in the Earth-like bio-zone, which is currently the front line of the Walking West, as the hot line of the Bright Scourging is presently swallowing up the territory mile after mile. Once a peaceful and verdant grassland thousands of miles across, dotted with shady woodlands and lonely hills, this vast prairie is now overrun with untold numbers of constantly moving pilgrims, Brass Imperials, and the rest of the desperate and displaced diaspora. While many have already passed it by as a trap or at best a fool's refuge, thousands of the fleeing have swarmed the frontier boomtown of Gabriel's Trumpet – a place made insanely valuable by virtue of its nearby hardwood forests, a lumber mill, an iron mine, and stagecoach factory. All churning at top speed to nail together wheels and wagons for the fleeing masses. The beleaguered mayor of Gabriel's Trumpet was shot down in a bloody resource dispute fairly recently, leaving grizzled

lawman (and gunslinger) Yancy Polk as the last voice for sanity as everyone else is seeing fit to tear each other apart as they run for the horizon.

Heaven's Shade is the name for the Ring of Fire's inner-orbital shade ring and observation-and-command platform. Itself a massive superstructure with the circumference of a more closely-orbiting planet, the vast majority of the Shade's area is nothing but (malfunctioning) solar shutters, with only thin atmosphere-holding corridors connecting the few control centers that are up there. If you think the Grand Stair can make for a long walk, there's at least one featureless hallway up there where you can walk in an almost imperceptible arc for a couple hundred million miles without having to take a single sidestep – you know, in case you just want to jog a quarter-lap around the sun in the morning. There is one dark jewel on this lofty crown – a fortress of a command module known as the God's Eye, where the Man with Red Hands has made his nest and oversees the ruin of this world. Surrounded by sensors, a genius-level artificial intelligence security system, and layers of shielded bulkheads and booby-trapped airlocks, the place is all but impenetrable. 'All but', so I'm told, includes the fact that there's a Door up there to some impossibly remote expanse of the Grand Stair – leaving the Man free to come and go as he pleases, but good luck to the rest of us in figuring out a shortcut up there. In his inner sanctum within the God's Eye the Man with Red Hands has assembled for himself a throne of bones before a bank of hundreds of monitor screens, so that he can watch in comfort the chaos and carnage his machinations have wrought.

Final Thoughts

The Ring of Fire is a desperate, volatile place. It isn't stable, it isn't safe, and it sure as hell isn't getting better any time soon. Pretty soon the entire ring will have been scorched to cinders, and presumably by then the bad guy's plan will have run its course and the worst of troubles will be over. But, knowing all this, whether you can just sit back and let it happen is up to you. I've already made my choice, but then again I never slept well anyway.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Gunpowder/Steam/Post-Fusion
Magic Level:	Rare
Security:	None
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: the Man with Red Hands)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Average Wrighting – Average
Special*:	*Magic is For the Living and the Dead* - The mystical laws of this gossamer reality and the heavy investment of the Eidolon in the ring-world's physical structure make it easier to use Powers on living matter and more difficult to use the same on inanimate objects or the environment. Uses of Powers which target living (or undead) creatures can be performed in half the usual time, with half the usual effort. Uses of Powers which require a contest of Attributes between the user and the target are not affected and behave as normal. Uses of Powers which target inanimate objects or the environment take twice the usual time, with twice the usual effort.

How to Use The Ring of Fire

- Ring of Fire is a world of frontier survival, moral challenges, and the horror of an ever-encroaching doom. The people of this world are constantly called upon to make tough choices and terrible sacrifices, so even if the player characters do not share the same fate as the masses they should be allowed to see the pain of the less fortunate and empathize with the horrors of their world-on-the-edge.

- Several valuable ancient scrolls were once squirreled away by a Gossamer Lord in a humble cabin out in the middle of the big grassy nowhere of the Sweetgrass Territory. That cache is in danger, as the Bright Scourging approaches and cabin will soon be burnt to cinders. The characters are tasked with rescuing the texts, which seems simple enough, but when they arrive at the cabin they discover that a gunslinger happened upon the cabin and took the strange works, thinking they held clues to stopping the apocalypse. Now the characters must pursue the scrolls across the frontier, weaving their way through hordes of pilgrims and more.

- It is true that the Man with Red Hands has orchestrated this entire apocalypse in order to torment one soul – Annie Parsons, who was once upon a time a victim of the Nightmare Kingdom. While her friends died in the Kingdom's horrific dreamscape, Annie survived and escaped against all odds, fleeing to this gossamer reality with a spark of power which rendered her ageless. Thinking she'd been given a second chance, Annie made a life for herself in a nice little cottage on the wild prairie, but the Man with Red Hands arrived to make good on old vendettas. His aim is to torment her to the point she loses all morality and sanity, returning to the Nightmare Kingdom to serve as its thrall (or ruler). Annie has the potential to become a great Gossamer Lord, but only if she survives this ordeal with her soul intact. Can the characters find her and help her?

- The Man with Red Hands is a villain worth stopping. Once the characters hear of the atrocities being committed on this world, can they stay away? Perhaps an associate implores them to act where others have failed. The Door which leads directly to Heaven's Shade is thought to be impossibly far away – can they reach it? Travel to the ring-world's surface is simple enough, but getting from the surface up to the shade ring could be difficult. Let them try and save the day.

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

INK

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: INK

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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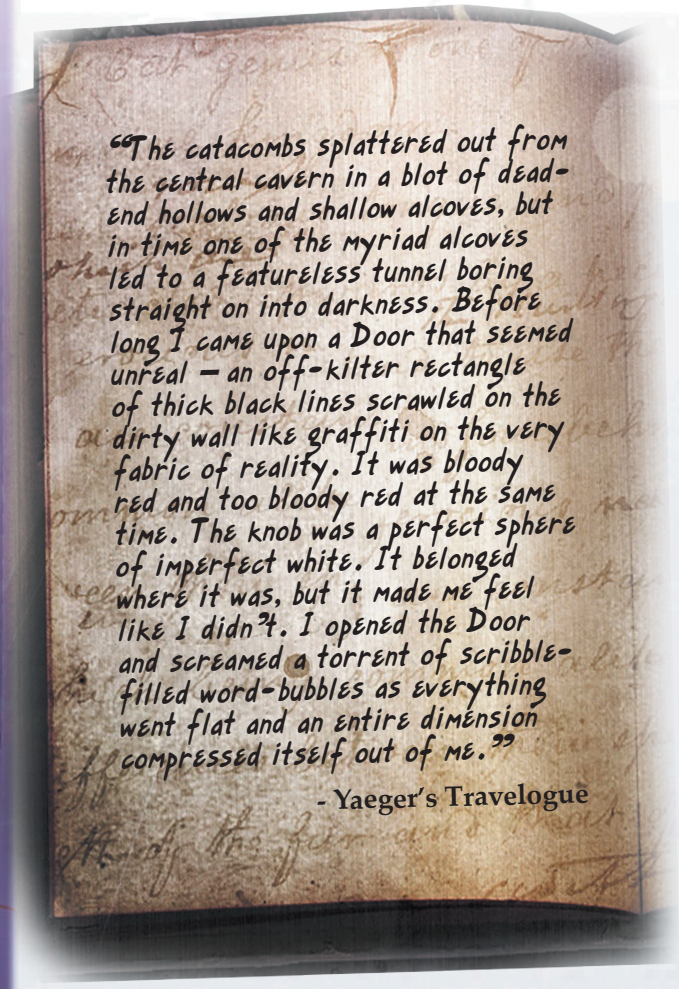


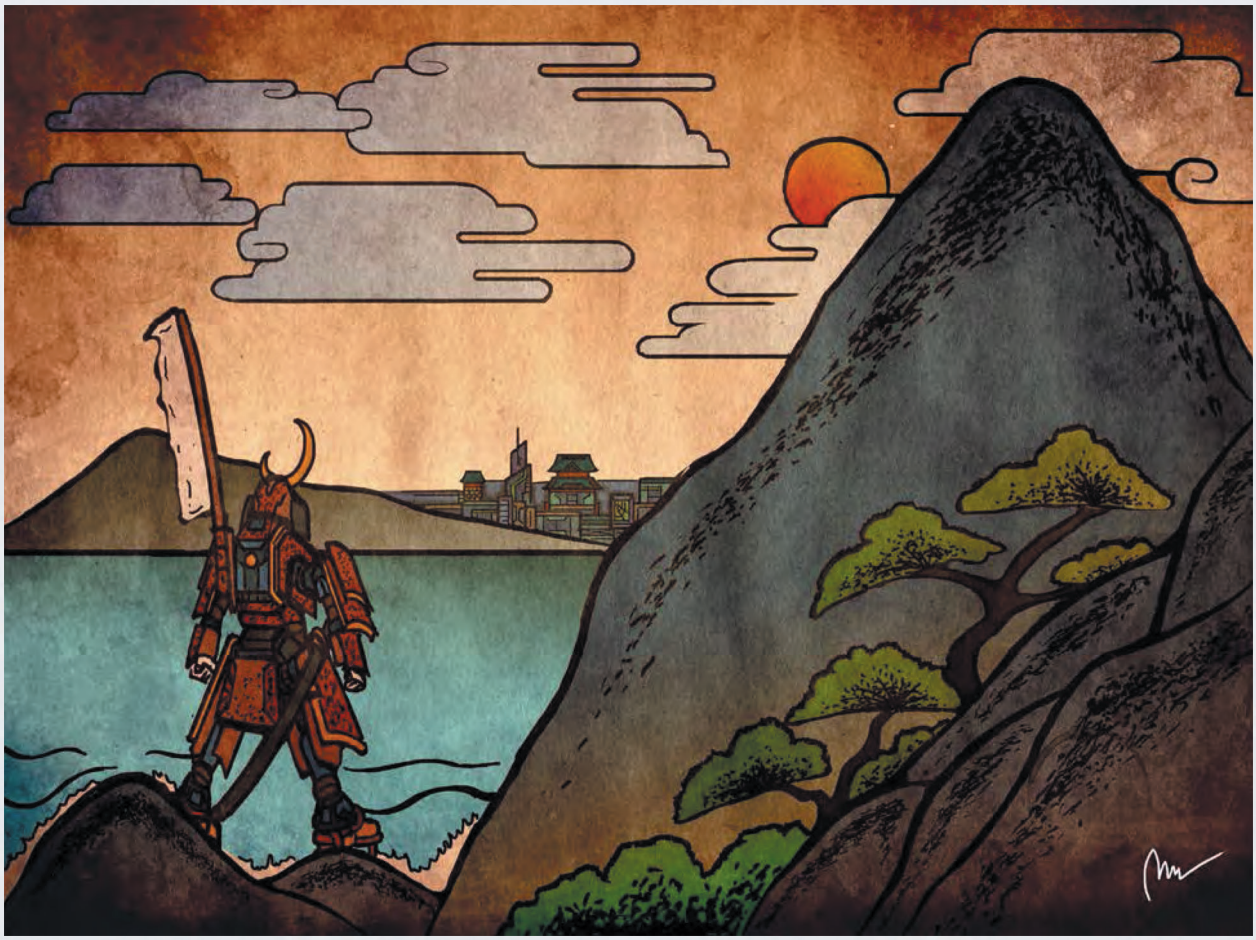
INK is a two-dimensional Gossamer world populated with illustrated life – an entire reality filled with sentient scribbles, conscious cartoons, and proud portrait civilizations, all imported from across the multiverse and given room to roam on INK's blank white sheets. This importing is the work of the mysterious Annunaki, those strange glowing diagram-beings who pop up and exert the will of the Eidolon all up and down the Grand Stair. The Annunaki have been using INK for eons as a repository, habitat, and preserve for two-dimensional life – in other words, a big zoo. Whether this zoo's purpose is scientific research, recreational collecting, or religious obsession is a topic ripe for speculation. It seems the Annunaki have perfected a technique to 'scan' two-dimensional works in other worlds and then 'print' (or 'draw', or 'paint') those images directly onto the infinite sheets of white space which are the basic fabric of INK's gossamer reality. It is important to note that the flat, blank whiteness of INK isn't a sterile void – it's raw reality, pregnant with infinite potential, and it *wants* to be alive. These features make INK the equivalent of a multiversal doodle-book, not only recording illustrated material from a myriad of far-flung worlds and alien cultures... but also imbuing those drawings with a strange life of their own.

INK is segmented into an untold number of distinct but inter-related sheets – geometrically flat planes of existence with height and width but zero thickness. The majority of these sheets are rectangular planes ranging in size from a single room to the breadth of a small country, but at the extremes some are as small as microdots and others as large as galaxies. Some of the more esoteric sheets are far stranger; I've heard of steeply-slanted triangle-cells, curly-edged fractal-cities, and even planes of insanity scrawled on impossibly-irregular polygons. They're all flat, though. Because the archetypical sheet is white and rectangular, it is easy to think of these planes as pages of paper – I do. These planes lay either next to each other along a single dimension, end

to end, or on top of one another in a theoretically infinite stack of infinitely-thin sheets. So, while nothing has a thickness per se, it is possible to delve "deeper" in a conceptual sense by traversing up and down the dimensional stack through holes, doors, and gaps... so if you thought that navigating a two-dimensional world might be as simple as up-down-left-right, think again.

Describing how the translation of movement and space work in two-dimensional reality is tricky, especially since many of INK's denizens and objects are drawings of things from three-dimensional gossamer realities, and viewers like us (I presume) are from three-dimensional realities ourselves. The practicalities of space and perspective are different from region to region; some sheets are drawn with a realistic sense of three-dimensional perspective, giving the illusion of three-dimensional movement and interaction, but others strictly minimalist side-scrolling nightmares where you have to go over or under everything, or blow it up in order to go through. Most speech comes out as balloon-like word bubbles, which is trippy, and can really mess with the use of sorcery and other abilities if you've never practiced your arts that way before. You just have to get used to it, go with the flow, and try not to think too hard about what you're perceiving, otherwise you'll break your brain.

The Rendering is the reality-twisting process of translating three-dimensional beings into their two-dimensional "illustrated" equivalents, occurring whenever a being enters INK, and re-occurring whenever a visitor travels from one sheet of INK to another sheet of a different artistic "style" – e.g., from black-line sketches to full-color paintings, from side-viewed portraiture to top-down cartography, or from dot-printed cartoon to cut-out watercolor collage. I can tell you, it feels super duper weird. A Gossamer Lord entering INK for the first time can expect the experience to be painful, disorienting, and if you're not physically or mystically strong enough to keep moving as you adapt, you might just freeze in place... trapped in still life forever.



Half-Drawn Horror

Gossamer Lords and Ladies are presumed to have enough psychic tenacity and physical hardiness to endure the rendering without incident... most of the time. However, in situations of great stress, such as undergoing the rendering while injured, attacked, or cursed, the rendering sometimes goes wrong, leaving a person half-drawn – a smeared, motley patchwork of off-color flesh and bad rotoscoping. Being half-drawn is painful and exceedingly dangerous, as it puts a body out of synch with the illustrated world around them, subject to potentially lethal contradictions in reality. A half-drawn person might find themselves impaled on the pointy caps of the unyielding waves when jumping into a cartoon ocean, or get their head smashed between two colliding word-bubbles. This traumatic condition can be remedied by leaving INK, resting, and eventually re-entering, but repeated rendering mishaps can lead to permanent damage. There are tales of pour souls who hastily left INK half-drawn... and remained that way. Moreover, the Drafters consider the half-drawn to be abominations, and will appear before long to erase the mistake.

Typical Denizens

Sketches are the most prevalent type of denizen you will find filling INK's pages – an insanely broad and diverse category of cartoon persons and line-drawn beasts copied from the comics, illustrations, and imagery of an infinitude of cultures from all up and down the Grand Stair. On a single cosmopolitan street in Panelopolis, for example, you could encounter a pair of talking finches pulled from one of Darwin's meticulous expeditionary sketchbooks, a chatty gaggle of grotesque boardwalk-style celebrity caricatures, and an entire army of happy little cartoon toasters. You'll find plenty of bold comic book heroes, wide-eyed manga-boys, and no shortage of storybook characters. There are also the stranger, "alien" works, like the sentient diagrams of summoning circles copied from the glass scrolls of Rigel IX, or the arcane tarot of another universe's fictional zodiac. Whether they're an illustration of a person, animal, or anthropomorphic object, what makes a sketch a sketch is the level of "realism", or lack thereof, in its rendering. Sketches which are "too" realistic might be shunned by their peers as pretentious Portraits, and sloppy works which lack detail could be referred to derogatorily as Scribbles – all social judgments borne out by the denizens of INK themselves. To us, they're all just forms of illustrated life along a continuum... right?

Portraits are the social and intellectual elite of INK – a rarified strata of illustrated life comprised of only the most detailed works. Talking to a portrait isn't the same as talking to the *subject* of the portrait, because the process by which the Drafters scan and reprint two-dimensional content gathered from across the multiverse doesn't *also* glean the memories of that subject's life experiences. You might encounter a portrait that bears an uncanny resemblance to somebody you think you know, but it won't be them, even if the portrait insists otherwise. There are rumors of exceptions to the rule, but I've never confirmed

that frightening proposition. Most portraits, whether they're depictions of fictional subjects or historical ones, make up grandiose titles and elaborate backstories based upon how they appear and what they wear. There's the stern and blustery August Council of Lords Chamberlain, filled with dusty deans, steely CEOs, and grumpy governors who gather to debate serious business they know nothing about. There's the heavily-guarded Gallery of the Unseen Pantheon – a sheet filled with depictions of gods whose depiction is explicitly forbidden on their home worlds. My personal favorite is the entire legion of Dorian Gray knock-offs, each one a different age and temperament, all locked in a bizarre fratricidal (suicidal?) quest to ritually consume all other Grays until there shall be only one.

Scribbles are the downtrodden yet dangerous underclass of INK – the stick figures, the malformed aliens that look like cacti, the whorls of messy spirals obscuring something never meant to be seen. Derided as half-drawn freaks and shunned by most other denizens, scribbles look simple but can have deep and complex emotions. Consider the stick-figure man, wrought from a mere half-dozen uneven lines – from his primitive and limited perspective, how incomprehensibly grand is a rendering of a house; or, conversely, how terrifying is the sight of a "real" face's subtle curves? Scribbles prefer to hunt and forage in the mostly-blank regions of INK, harvesting dots and spearing the occasional plump circle, though some inhabit the corners and niches of densely-populated areas like scuttling urchins (or vermin). Eerily common are the Thazyu Mummies – shambling, spider-handed figures intent on carrying out mistranslated echoes of maternal instinct, mumbling creepy rhymes about snuggly-hugs but more likely than not to rip your arm off and eat it in a burst of feral shrieking.

Threats

Drafters are the illustrators of this illustrated world – a special type of Annunaki who have mastered the nuances of INK's peculiar gossamer reality to devastating effect. Drafters appear and disappear at whim, printing beings, objects, and structures into existence with laser-thin rays of icy blue light. Despite what the name might imply, I don't think the Drafters are artistic creators – I think they've traveled the multiverse scanning images from trillions of hand-drawn manuscripts or printed pages, and upon return to INK they print what they've collected onto the local fabric of gossamer reality. All Annunaki are terribly dangerous, but Drafters are especially so, particularly in this gossamer reality. Drafters can "summon" an infinite variety of minions and hazards by drawing them around you, add a gaping chest wound to your torso with a few quick lines, or simply vanish you by slicing open the reality beneath your feet and trapping you in a doorless sheet of blank white space. So long as visitors don't disrupt the status quo of INK too much, the Drafters seem to consider lesser beings beneath their notice, but you never know where they'll – pardon the pun – *draw the line*. If you

Drafters are advanced Annunaki exploiting the rules of INK, and have the following qualities:

Integral to a Power (Eidolon) [4 Points]

Immense Vitality [4 Points]

Double Speed [2 Points]

Teleportation [10 Points]

Tireless Stamina [4 Points]

Combat Mastery [4 Points]

Destructive Damage [8 Points] – editing off foes' limbs, drawing horrific wounds into their being, or simply deleting them

Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]

Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]

Psychic Barrier [4 Points]

Search Through Worlds [4 Points]

Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] – capable of drawing nearly any creature, hazard, or environment into being

Self Healing [1 Point]

suspect that you might've smudged one of their favorite works, flee the realm immediately and may the Stair help you.

If encountered outside of the gossamer reality of INK, a Drafter is limited to the lesser qualities of a "standard" Annunaki, plus Teleportation.

Erasers are a particular form of the reality-eradicating Erebi unique to this Gossamer world. They're still rampaging monsters of pure Shadow, but here they tend to appear as howling voids of blank space. In areas of INK where pure white is the background color, Erasers can be damn near invisible until they're right up on you and the foreground starts dissolving. Erasers also seem to be able to move through INK along dimensions inaccessible to everything else, boring through sheets like a lit cigarette burning holes in newspaper. Once upon a time these terrors were rare, but recently the rates of sightings and attacks have skyrocketed. I don't know if it is possible for Annunaki to get worried, but rumor is the Drafters are on the ropes trying to contain the menace. That can't be good.

Major Maim is a comic book supervillain turned existential nihilist and all-around pissed-off guy. He's got super strength, super toughness, and a super bad attitude. In his origin story the Major was a stock comic caricature of Panelopolis, instinctively filling his role as an over-the-top foil, but during a climactic battle with his do-gooder nemesis Stu Straightedge the two supers punched a literal hole in the fabric of INK's reality, cracking open a Door. Oops. While the loose Door was swiftly sealed by the Drafters, Major Maim was forever changed by what he saw. He hasn't gone crazy, he's just gone sane in a very dangerous way. Convinced that the gaudy world around him is a meaningless sham and that invisible puppet-masters are pulling everyone's strings, Major Maim is intent on breaking out of this newly-perceived prison and taking the fight to powers that be. He's on the scent of the Drafters but hasn't had any luck in cornering one of them for questioning – *yet*. While this might seem noble in the abstract, Major Maim tends to use his existential quest of revelation and liberation as an excuse to inflict brutal violence on anything he perceives as part of the grand conspiracy. I have learned through personal experience that this includes well-meaning Gossamer Lords, and while *normally* I'm happy to educate newly-awakened beings on the mysteries of the Grand Stair, there's only so much super-strong face-punching a guy can take in the name of sharing the wisdom. Complicating matters further, the Umbra has chosen Maim as a champion, steadily influencing his activities and increasing his power level with every passing day. Eventually Major Maim *will* break through the borders of this carefully-curated world of pages and print, and when he starts stomping up and down the Grand Stair... we're going to have a problem.

Major Maim is a terrible toon with the following qualities:

Stupendous Vitality [8 Points] – the angrier he gets, the stronger he gets, and Major Maim is always very angry

Engine Speed [4 Points]

Tireless Stamina [4 Points]

Combat Mastery [4 Points]

Deadly Damage [4 Points]

Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]

Psychic Resistance [1 Point]

Psychic Sensitivity [1 Point]

Pass Through Door [1 Point] – Major Maim has not yet embarked upon the Grand Stair, but in theory he could.

Rapid Healing [2 Points]

Alternate Form [1 Point] – alter ego Melvin Milquetoast, a struggling cartoonist with a limp and a stutter.

Granted additional power by the Umbra, Major Maim can use the abilities of Weakening Reality, Warping Reality, and Destabilizing Reality as if he possessed the Power of Umbra Mastery. The Major believes these abilities are innate super powers – extensions of his trademark "Raze Gaze" eye-beams. Use of these powers comes at a psychological cost, triggering hallucinations and bouts of amnesia which serve to direct him toward targets of the Umbra's choosing.

Notable Locations

The Scroll Kingdoms are a wide tableau of sheets containing illustrations from what might be considered "ancient" scrolls, tomes, and manuscripts from a variety of Gossamer worlds – some Earth-like, many not. There are gorgeous black and white vistas of INK-brushed mountains, intricate illuminations of the wars of antiquity, and dark woodcut printings of arching devils and apocalyptic doom. One desert-like sheet the color of dusty papyrus holds innumerable cartouche-tombs of alien pharaohs, each one simply-carved in appearance yet containing slumbering lords of terrible power. Separating most of these country-like kingdoms are the sepia-tone seas and relief-drawn ranges of Greater Cartographia, a vast top-down expanse of maps and charts both historical and fanciful, where entire continents and imagined coastlines sprawl beneath your feet and the admonition 'Here There Be Dragons' should be well-heeded. The myriad domains of the Scroll Kingdoms are usually locked in perpetual repetition of the scenes they depict, so while you can visit an individual kingdom and interact with its inhabitants for a span, eventually the kingdom's internal clock will reset and nobody is likely to remember the odd stranger who once came to visit. From my perspective this is undoubtedly a good thing, otherwise I would have a few more cuckolded kings and disapproving dragons to add to my ever-growing multiversal list of entirely-undeserved enemies. The dark heart of the Scroll Kingdoms is a single incredibly tall sheet called the Tar'y'goth Tapestry – seven hundred and seventy-seven vertical layers of depictions of ancient cthonic gods and sordid hell-raising ritual, each panel depicting the historical roots of all infinity's descent into madness. Creepy.

Panelopolis is a mega-city built of stacks upon stacks of comic books, and it is every bit as weird and awesome as that sounds. Thousands upon thousands of sheets the size of skyscrapers line up side by side, each one presenting millions upon millions of smaller panels depicting the adventures and tribulations of dashing heroes and cackling villains. It's a dense place, chock full of bustling, bizarre neighborhoods. Big Little Mangatown is a tightly-packed inner-city neighborhood of

small black and white panels filled with daily-life moments, wide-eyed schoolgirls, and an unsavory underworld of demons and tentacle-monsters lurking in the dark alleys of the back-pages. Wreathing the outskirts of Panelopolis are the Funnypaper Farms – sprawling suburbs of cartoons ranging in theme from genial domestic humor to the mind-bending symbolic philosophy of Hel'Urth-1603 (not my favorite reading for a Sunday morning, but popular enough in other sections of the Stair to warrant its own bustling burg). Supermanhattan is the vibrantly-colored central-most neighborhood of skyscrapers and fortresses-of-solitude, where 'BOOM' and 'KAPOW' light up the towering skyline like billboards and nobody seems to wear pants the right way. Supermanhattan is the stomping ground of the ultra-dangerous Major Maim, who rains down beatings from his habitual perch – the rooftop panel of *The Weekly Wonder* building.

The Scrawl is the outback of INK – a vast array of very large, mostly-blank sheets populated by predatory packs of scribbles and odd nomadic

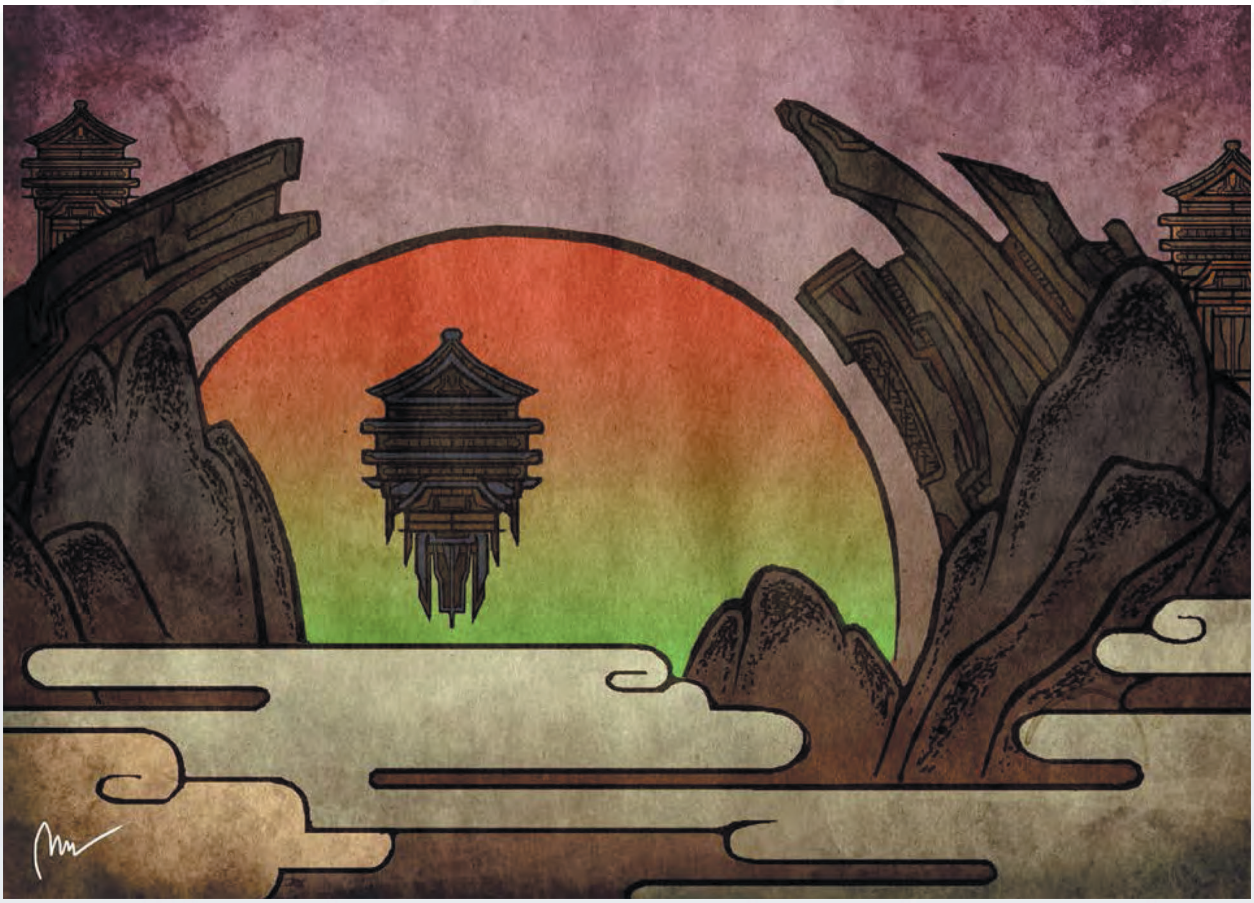
The Weekly Wonder is the towering central "newspaper" building of Panelopolis, publishing meta-aware captions which report the current events of Panelopolis as well as frighteningly-detailed historical footnotes and annoying advertisements. These quirky little reality-sidebars can pop up anywhere at any time, usually accompanied by the disembodied voice of an interjecting narrator. Sometimes these captions provide benign exposition or useless trivia – like an obvious statement about exactly what you're doing as you're doing it, or the specific time Major Maim last battled the Lightbox League – but sometimes the sidebar will, eerily, tell you exactly what you need to know.

doodles. While other regions of INK are well-organized, even tidy in their boxy layout and appearance, the Scrawl is far less regimented, tending to show the influence of the Umbra in its spare, shifting terrain and oft-mutating denizens. Tribes of cave-painted stick figures hunt ochre wildebeests between strata of thin blue lines, and rough sketches haunt the wastes like half-formed ghosts. There are hazards – spiraling maze-doodles that choke the terrain like aggressive kudzu, fields of razor-sharp pentagram-stars, and splattery blots of color so pure that they'll swallow you up as surely as a gravitational singularity. Sequestered out in the most remote expanses are hidden outposts of arcane sophistication – INK-black obelisks of alien architectural schematics, still-image prisons of intergalactic war criminals long captured, and one edenic enclave of illicitly-copied Wrighting icons where you might be shocked to see a familiar face or two. My favorite sight in the Scrawl is the super-massive flock of fluttering hearts which roves the outback like a plague-level swarm of adorable locusts; each one of the millions of hearts has its own unique soul – a translation of an echo of the melding between the pining hand which drew it and the distant love which inspired it. Somewhere in that swarm I wonder if there's a copy of a little heart drawn for me, once upon a time, by a heartbroken hand long lost.

Final Thoughts

INK is a strange place... one that reminds me that the multiverse is not necessarily built for us – we're just accustomed to moving around in the parts where we fit. There are other places very different from and just as real as the three-dimensional halls and solid floors we traverse, yet separated from our understanding by daunting gulfs of perspective. Also, INK makes me wonder about the phenomenon of life, and the forms it takes; if a two-dimensional doodle on a scrap of paper can, in this Gossamer world, achieve substance enough to seize life for itself, then what does that say about us? Are we all just simplified copies of fifth-dimensional beings? Would we ever know if we were? But most of all, I appreciate INK for its incalculable oddity, for after all – isn't that what exploration is all about?

~ Yaeger Zane



Domain	
Technology Level:	Varies
Magic Level:	Magic is Known and Believed
Security:	None
Type:	Common Ground [2 Points] (current owners: the Annunaki; other Gossamer Lords may hold minor personal domains)
Control:	Control of Time Flow [2 Points]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Powerful Umbra – Average Wrighting – Easily Used
Special:	*The Pen Is Mightier* – Art is power. Drawing utensils which have been imbued with some sort of Power have the ability to mold gossamer reality in INK. Characters wielding such implements have the ability to mold INK's reality by drawing new things or making alterations to existing works. A character could bore a hole through a mountain by drawing a tunnel opening, alter a creature's mood by drawing a smile on its face, or even summon a thunderstorm by drawing a bunch of clouds and raindrops. Such mystical drawing implements occur in roughly three tiers of power, and depending on their strength may grant the equivalent of the qualities Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point], Mold Gossamer Creatures [2 Points], or Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points].

How to Use INK

- INK is a spectacularly strange Gossamer world, fundamentally changing the ground rules of what we take for granted as "reality". It is one of many. Use INK as a reminder that the infinity of existence is much more than just spherical dirt-balls and boring cubicles for men of meat. Forget what you think you know.

- As an optional rule, any use of the '*The Pen Is Mightier*' special ability mentioned above should require the *player* to draw, sketch, or doodle whatever it is that their character is attempting to draw into being. Effort and enthusiasm are much more important than actual artistic merit, so don't judge harshly, however particularly inspired artwork may be rewarded with advantages or Good Stuff. Alternative mediums are also acceptable, depending on the realm they're in; a player might compose a collage of a chimerical monster out of magazine clippings, or present an ephemeral watercolor representing an emotion spell.

- Plots thicken as *The Weekly Wonder*'s captions begin popping up with disturbing, disruptive, and downright seditious messages. Xenophobic propaganda promotes aggressive expansion of Panelopolis' borders. Revelations of past betrayals pit comic book heroes against each other. Screeds against the world's hidden puppetmasters incite rebellion against the Drafters. War is brewing – but to what end, and by whose design? Is this Major Maim's doing, or is he just another pawn? Perhaps the mysterious meta-intelligence behind *The Weekly Wonder* has become corrupted – or liberated – by the Umbra. Even the indecipherable Annunaki seem worried that all of INK might catch fire and burn.

- There's a theory that the overall shape of INK's gossamer reality is a super-colossal möbius strip – a non-orientable two-dimensional manifold that seems perfectly flat to its internal inhabitants yet, in totality, is something oddly twisted. The characters are tasked with testing this heretical hypothesis by finding the edge of INK (where it falls off precipitously into the abyss of Shadow), and then tracing that edge all the way around until they reach their starting point. It's a trip the length of a universe, but some wild-eyed mathematicians say it's possible.

- The Lenses of Cervani are legendary artifacts which appear to be a pair of red and blue "3D glasses" (though no resident of INK is likely to know them by such a description). The Lenses allow the wearer to see through into sheets which are "above" or "below" their current position in the potentially-infinite layered stacks of two-dimensional planes which make up INK's reality. While incredibly handy for navigating this world, the local denizens consider the Lenses cursed because they tend to drive any wearer insane with a maddening overload of information; any being with a Psyche score of 25 or more is strong enough to use them safely.

- Conceptualizing space and movement in a two-dimensional reality is an intriguing challenge, but it means you can create "terrain" for this world out of flat stuff! Lay down pieces of paper to model the planes of INK you're exploring; include blank white sheets, pages of your own drawings, and illustrations of any type of landscape, backdrop, or location. Entire books are fair game, too. Use the physical arrangement of the papers as a planar model – when two pages are next to each other, characters can cross from one plane to the next by crossing a border; when one page is on top of another, characters must find a hole, door, or other way to transfer from one layer to the one above or below them, and so on. INK is vast, with an untold numbers of layers – so a layout of a region of INK could be a room-covering sprawl of notebooks, oceans of loose leaf scrawlings, and deep stacks of gorgeous coffee table books. Spread out and dive in!

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Fury

by Matt Banach

Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Fury

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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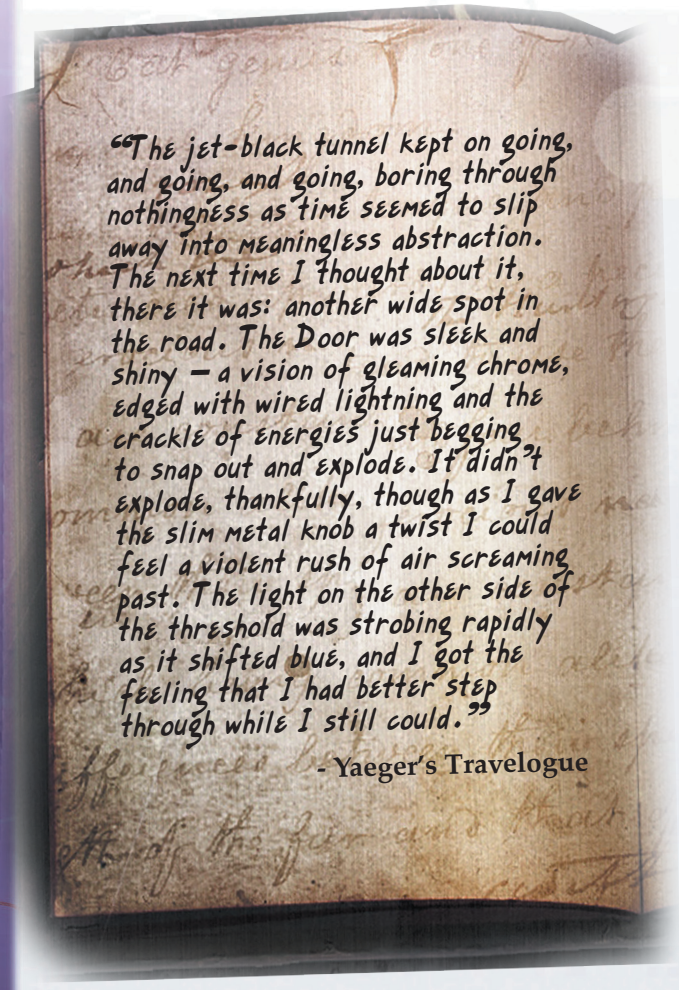


Once there was a universe, tipped out of balance. Then there was galaxy, torn apart by war. Then there was a system, where speed meant life. In the end, there was only Fury. In the end, we all race death.

Fury is the last planet in the last system left in a universe shredded by unconventional war and the reality-annihilating consumption of Shadow. It used to be a normal planet, whatever that means. It isn't now. Not even close. Now, all the usual rules don't apply. Now, due to some inconceivable catastrophic disruption in the great cosmic balance, the strengths of the Umbra and the Eidolon depend on your speed relative to the planetary frame of reference. Slow down and stop, and the miasma of the Umbra envelopes you – your gear breaks down, your mind wanders to dangerous places, and before you know it you've mutated into something else entirely just by sitting there. Get moving quickly and things start to cohere, though you have to work up to a fast sprint just to get back to feeling normal. Accelerate beyond a run and it's like all the grime on the windshield of your soul is washing away as the Eidolon's perfect structure becomes clearer and clearer. This speed-dependent tension between the Umbra and the Eidolon influences everything and every facet of life-as-it-is on Fury, as how fast you're moving doesn't just define where you're going, but what you're even allowed to be.

Fury is a very large planet, about five times the mass of your average "Earth" and almost twice the radius, resulting in an Earth-like planet experiencing a gravity about a third greater than any of your average "Earths", and a *lot* of space to run around. Fury is an *old* planet; the molten core has become unstable, violent tectonic activity is at an all-time high, and plumes of volcanic ash are encroaching on the last of the big blue skies. Many of the planet's shallower seas have drained away or dried up, leaving behind vast salt flats where speedsters can race with nary a house or hill within a thousand miles. I should mention that, while it wasn't always, this gossamer reality is now geocentric – meaning the last remaining sun in this universe now revolves around Fury. And no, I have no idea how a planetary system can go from heliocentric to geocentric in a span of decades, other than chalking it up to 'cataclysmic cosmic upheaval' – research it on your own time. Joining the sun in the starless sky are about a dozen tiny moons whose reflective glow is all that keeps night on Fury from being an experience in utter darkness... except for all the green-fire methane plumes, and the aurora storms, and the zipping streaks of boomships screaming through the atmosphere like meteors.

What Happened?

There's a theory that Fury's very unique characteristics are the result of the effects of an ancient Dwimmerlaik artifact – some sort of horrifically-overpowered entropic polarizer buried at the planet's core, the activation of which cataclysmically exacerbated an unraveling of gossamer reality beyond the planetary system. Maybe.

The best days of Fury and its advanced once-upon-a-time civilizations are in the past; everywhere lay the ruins of crumbling mega-cities, crisscrossed by millions of miles of cracked and twisting super-highways. Remnants of high

Speedpaint, N

technology and sophisticated magical artifice remain in use, though even the lightning-fast hoverships and steady low-orbit space stations in use today pale in comparison to the inventions that were, or might have been. Magic and technology converge at their higher levels in this reality, making astounding feats such as teleportation, anti-gravity, and absurd rates of acceleration eminently possible.

Ludicrous Speed!

Consider these new movement-related Greater Qualities for Creatures or Artifacts, especially those in use in the speed-hungry reality of Fury:

Lightning Speed [8 Points]: The item or creature can move at speeds comparable to exceptional vehicles, keeping pace with bullet trains, supersonic jets, and even spacecraft.

Relativistic Speed [16 Points]: Capable of speeds pushing the boundaries of movement in conventional space-time, the item or creature can reach speeds which are a significant portion of (but do not exceed) the speed of light.

Practically speaking, a visit to Fury is an exercise in survival made only possible by constantly moving – very fast – at all times. The denizens of Fury usually accomplish this by perpetually zipping around on speedy Eidolon-infused hoverships or other ingenious structures borne aloft by antigravity engines. Setting foot on the planet's surface is a dangerous prescription for mutation and madness, likely to prove debilitating unless one happens to be an Umbra Master capable of tolerating – if not enjoying – such a heady saturation of Umbral energies.

Due to the constant roil of the unpredictable Umbra which happens at ground level, the terrain and environment in any particular zone or region is constantly shifting – plains of frozen tundra can turn into a mess of melting rivers in less than a day; lofty mountains might disappear into gremlin-infested sinkholes overnight; anywhere near a body of water is perpetually storm-wracked, except on the days when it isn't. Plenty of tidal regions have dissolved into bubbling swamps of acidic rainbow-colored tentacle-slime, and in places where the slime has eaten through the bedrock the ground gives way to immense cavern-systems hundreds of miles deep. The dark heart of Fury is riddled with cancerous Umbra-saturated hollows, and the fluctuating core of the planet may just be the closest thing to a direct spatial conduit to the Umbra you'll ever encounter on a Gossamer world.

Even though the Umbra seems to dominate the terrain of Fury, the brilliant clarity of the Eidolon is everywhere as well – if you can only get going fast enough to reach it. Blasting out of the muck of a festering chaos-bog, one can, with a few milliseconds of bone-pulverizing high-G acceleration, swiftly enter what seems to be an entirely different world of sentient light, enlightened engineering, and rocket-riding, face-melting, soul-shredding speed. Even the slowest floating fortresses zip along at hundreds of miles per hour, harvesting raw materials from the surface with discriminating tractor beams and high-tension scoop-lines, providing spacious gravity-defying habitation for scrappy salvagers and engineer-kings. Boomships blaze through the skies, bombastically punching holes through the sound barrier (hence the "boom" name), as crews of speedster scientists dogfight with Umbral goons and try and race to stay one step ahead of death. High above the festering chaos of Umbral lands, science stations in orbit zoom over all, providing lofty perches from which gravity-priests and physics-wizards perform their high magics and research just what went wrong with all creation, and learn how to survive this brave new world.

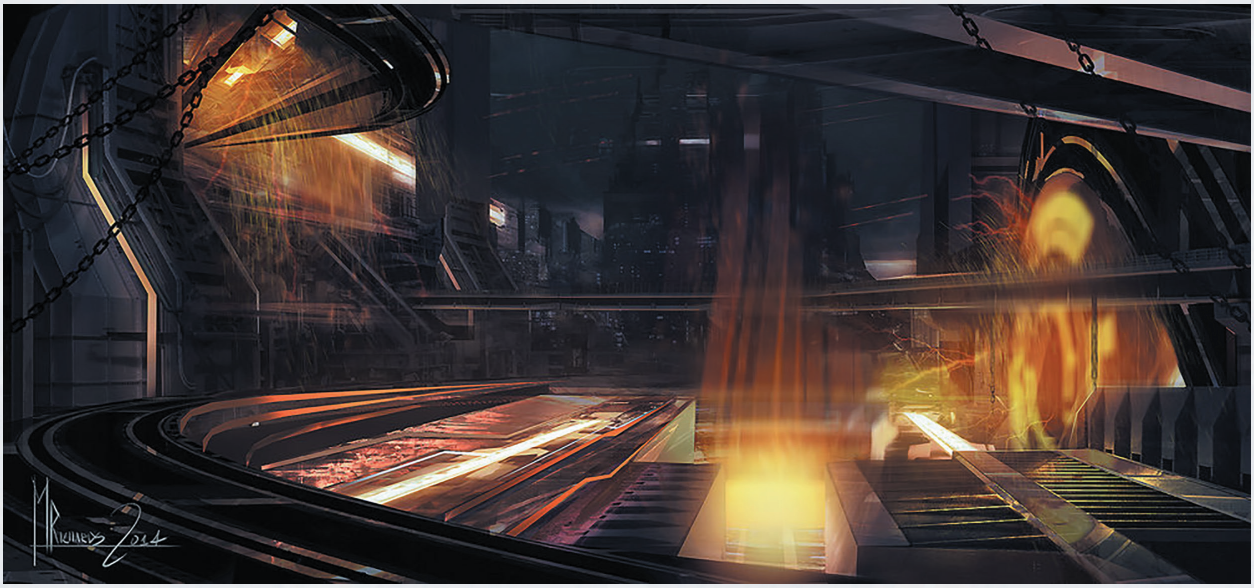
Typical Denizens

Racers are the motley variety of humanoids who still call Fury home, even if their ancestors did not originate from this planet. Many are human(ish), though their multi-hued skins are often covered with so many nano-enchanted tattoos, talismanic piercings, and psibernetic implants that it can be difficult to discern the natural shapes of the men and women beneath all those gewgaws. Living alongside the humans are a multitude of other "alien" breeds – most of them emigres and refugees from the intergalactic war which ravaged this reality just a few centuries ago. There are the flint-skinned Lithoni, a brilliant, six-armed, stone-bodied people whose movements and speech may appear slow to the ignorant but are in fact ultra-efficient efforts which accomplish more in a single gesture or sentence than most folks do all day. There's also the shrill, wooly Chorthons, a species of coppery fur-covered centipedes the size of ponies with an uncanny aptitude for melding energy, engineering, and

sorcery. Other rarer types also populate Fury, such as the sultry rabbit-earned Purva, the dour ink-eyed Gune, and the free-willed androids of Box. Though affiliations and affinities vary according to the individual, many "neutral" crews of racers pilot their hovership homes at relatively modest speeds, cruising in the turbulent middle zone between two cosmic forces, unwilling to surrender to the madness of the Umbra yet suspicious of shackling themselves to the bright but rigid structure of the Eidolon.

The Luminaries are an advanced race of lightning-like energy beings which originally evolved among this gossamer reality's far-flung nebulae. Preferring the unfettered expanses of space, Luminaries find planetary gravity nigh-unbearable and cannot tolerate standing still at ground level without the aid of specially-shielded containment suits. Ever adapting, they've recently begun genetically engineering humanoid bodies to house their energetic souls – hairless, seven-foot-tall frames with alabaster flesh, copper veins, and translucent skulls – making them look not-so-much like people and more like lightning poured into eerie people-shaped bottles. Strongly attuned to the Eidolon, the Luminaries are the great makers and supreme scientists of Fury. Zooming through the skies at mind-bending speeds, every breakthrough towards further acceleration brings them ever closer to the Eidolon's enlightened perfection. Alien and aloof, the often heartless Luminaries care little for worldly concerns but do engage in trade and communications with "lesser" races for the sake of scientific research and mutual survival against the predations of the Umbra and its agents. Small constellations of Luminary space-stations zip around in orbit around Fury, each one a crystal castle of scientific miracle and perfect design. Within them the Luminaries conduct their experiments and research exactly what went wrong with the universe and how they ended up in this sticky situation. Luminary attempts to colonize Fury's many moons have met with either disaster or mixed success at best. It seems the moons each have their own bizarre mystical properties which make them inhospitable to what the Luminaries would consider orderly, civilized life. In my experience, these cold bastards are perfectly content to let you crash and burn without a second thought, but usually they'll barter if you're polite and can offer them something of scientific interest from the slow, scummy surface where they'd rather not have to venture on their own.

The Myxogloth are a race of sentient slime molds closely attuned to the Umbra, taking the form of oily black bulb-headed trunks slowly ambulating about on skirts of writhing tentacles. You know, country folk. Perpetually growing, dividing, mutating, and returning to the collective biomass, individual Myxogloth tend not to exist in one form for very long. A single free-standing Myxogloth might bud, detach, shamble about for a few days, develop multiple personalities, find religion, master sorcery, then

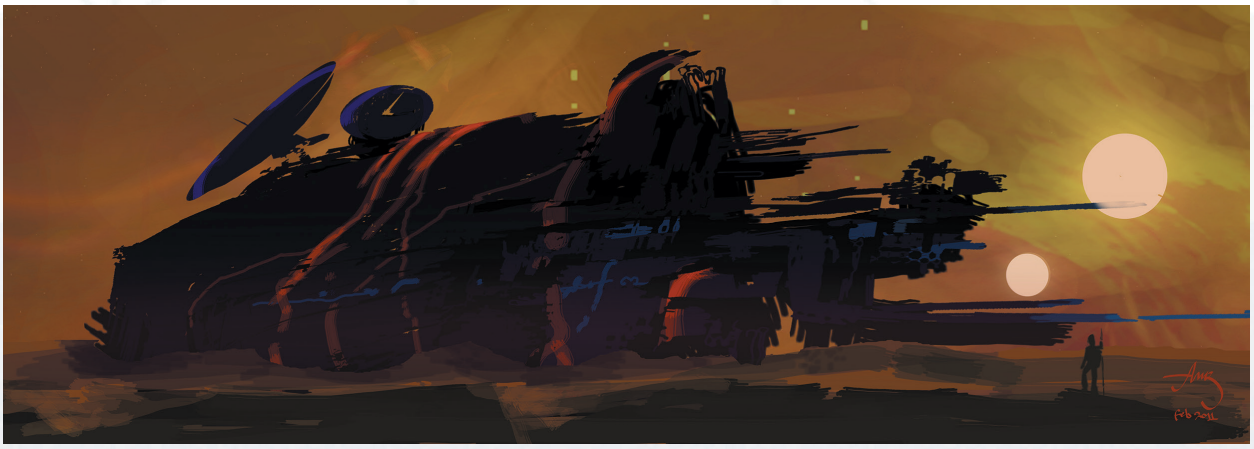


ultimately dissolve in a gibbering wreck only to be absorbed both psychically and physically by other Myxogloth so that the whole process can start again next week. Even "newborn" Myxogloth can be dangerous sorcerers, snaring passing hovercraft with weaponized gravity wells or blasting enemies with sanity-rending entropy-waves. Most Myxogloth colonies are oily underground cesspools, but their above-ground city-sproutings can include forests of towers hundreds of feet high guarded by fields of gravity-mines and thick nets of hungry, grasping tendrils. Even worse, the Myxogloth have taken to raising gremlins (as in, the infesting entropic scourge-creatures of Brokeworld) as minions, foodstuffs, and self-replicating weapons-of-mass-destruction; just see what happens when a low-flying boomship sucks one of those little gremlin bastards into an engine. While the Myxogloth are intelligent in their own way, dealing with them is very difficult. Myxogloth are dangerously curious and often respond to new creatures by shrieking, grappling them, externally digesting them with acidic secretions, then copying their genetics in a series of freakish experimental buddings as they grow new heads and try to have a conversation. All in all, unless you're an Umbra Master with a spare set of clothes, they're best avoided.

Threats

Dragnaughts are eerie hovering warships controlled by the inscrutable elder intelligences of the collective Myxogloth. Crafted from magic, stone, and hardened slime, these golem-like vehicular constructs float through the skies above Fury and emit miles-wide deceleration fields which pose a deadly obstacle to aerial transport. Pass through the edge of a Dragnaught's deceleration field and maybe you'll just lose some speed, but hit one or two square-on and even the swiftest ride can grind to a halt. Dragnaughts are generally regarded as hungry and spiteful, eager to snare any fast-flying prey they can and then digest them with disgusting sprays of sticky acidic mucus. Though they can often be seen squatting in the ground-level muck or bobbing slowly through darkened skies, when crossing any significant distance Dragnaughts teleport rather than fly through the intervening space. In this way, by folding space-time instead of crossing it, Dragnaughts cheat and remain "stationary" while still being able to pursue and intercept lightning-fast boomships. Taking down a Dragnaught is no easy task, because in addition to the deceleration fields, the acidic mucus, and the teleportation, each hulking monstrosity is protected by an uncertainty-displacement effect which makes them nearly impossible to hit with missiles or conventional munitions. While historically the Dragnaughts merely patrolled the skies above Fury as isolated dangers, in recent years they've been massing in clusters of greater and greater number, occasionally blockading entire regions of the planet and threatening to take down even the highest satellite-cities of the Luminaries.

Speed demons are bodiless phantoms which haunt the higher dimensions all around Fury, occasionally drawn into the conventional three-dimensional world by the tantalizing ripples in space-time which occur (at least in this peculiar gossamer reality) when things get going really fast. In essence, these strange entities can *smell* speed, and go after fast-moving objects likes sharks to a bleeding seal. While the mythology of the speed demons is widespread across Fury, different folk have different beliefs about the true nature of these super-fast phantoms. Like drunken sailors at sea, some Racers swear to apocryphal tales of encounters with ghosts at high speeds, while other crews dismiss the tales as superstitious nonsense. A few Luminary zealots believe the accounts of "speed demon" phenomena to be their ancestors, or a cousin-race of energy beings, trying to make contact from a parallel dimension only accessible at relativistic speeds. The truth, as best I can figure, is that these so-called "speed demons" are actually dimensionally-constrained prisoners – war criminals from the vast galactic conflict which preceded the current state of affairs – trapped in high-energy vibrational frequencies. Once upon a time these evil yahoos were punished and reduced to "spirits", their bodies eradicated but their minds and spirits encoded as information, then blasted across the galaxy in what was *supposed* to be an eternity of purgatory through the vacuum... until their signal-cells got trapped in Fury's gravity well during the great calamity. Now these waves of VIP incarceration orbit Fury at dizzying speeds, yearning to match their direction and frequency to that of a boomship going at just the right speed... and then doing everything in their power to make that



crew's lives a living Hell. At a minimum speed demons will plague a ship with malfunctions, alien trash talk, and disturbing visions; the more powerful ones can exert psychic influence on lesser beings up to and including mind control and bodily possession if the ship in question stays in synch with the speed demon's signal too long. Occasionally you can shake a speed demon simply by slamming on the brakes, but sometimes that isn't possible for other reasons. Subtle speed demons are the most dangerous, exerting their insidious influence on a boomship set on autopilot for hours or days before anyone notices who might've disappeared, or those tiny little bloodstains on the bulkhead.

Sigma Heisenberg is one of a kind – the most amazing, most impossible, most unpredictable woman in the multiverse. She's a mercurial Umbra Master, a gifted engineer and sorceress, and is absolutely incapable of being told she cannot do something. Case in point, when Sigma first visited Fury and some haughty Luminary hierophant opined that Umbra Masters belonged squatting on the ground in this world, Sigma immediately stole the fastest boomship she could find and punched it up to Mach 25 just to thumb her nose and stretch her legs. Even though high speeds increase the power of the Eidolon in this gossamer reality, Sigma relishes zipping around in a souped-up boomship, practicing her Umbral arts deep in enemy territory – kinda like a masochistic metaphysical version of running with a parachute. She once told me that the sensation was transcendent but exceedingly painful, then wiped the blood from her nose and hit the gas with the wickedest grin I'd ever seen. I remember Sigma as petite, wiry, and silver-haired, with an unruly pixie-cut, fierce lavender eyes, and more tattoos than me – though the details of her appearance are as mercurial as her whims and she views her physical body as an ever-twisting kaleidoscope, not a static canvas. To the rest of Fury, Sigma Heisenberg is a lightning bolt from on high, striking without warning and with devastating effect. She's often glimpsed skirmishing with speed demons and making surgical raids on Luminary science stations, all according to her own unknown master plan. A well-traveled Warden of the Grand Stair, Sigma isn't a homebody; sometimes she leaves Fury for years at a time to explore the Grand Stair, but woe upon any Gossamer Lord foolish enough to mistake her absence for abdication. The last would-be usurper who thought he'd jump Sigma's claim to Fury found out what it's like to experience orbital re-entry on the outside of a ship, then be keelhauled through a thousand miles of fungal swamp, and then be dumped in the Agora with pictures of the whole ordeal stapled to what little remained of his face. Though I do so at great peril to my body and soul, I love this woman. Truly. Once, after I thought we'd gotten very close, I made the mistake of stepping off her ship for a smoke and a leisurely stretch of my wings, thinking that she'd wait for me; it wasn't until I heard the sonic boom that I realized that Sigma Heisenberg doesn't slow down for anyone. Of all the many romances I've had across the multiverse, Sigma will always be the one that challenged me the most, the one that left me breathless, and the one that got away. In one way or another I've been trying to catch up with her ever since.

Sigma Heisenberg

Attributes

Psyche – 35 Points
Strength – 20 Points
Endurance – 30 Points
Warfare – 45 Points

Powers

Umbra Mastery [50 Points]
Warden of the Grand Stair [10 Points]
Sorcery [15 Points]
Cantrips [5 Points] – Glitch, Grasp, Nullify, Paralyze, Quicken

Artifacts & Creatures

The Tzimtzum [18 Points] – Stolen, souped-up, and sanctified in blood-magic, this patchwork bucket of bolts is one of the fastest boomships in Fury, capable of staggering acceleration and impossible maneuvers.

- Lightning Speed [8 Points]* – *Capable of reaching relativistic speeds for short, risky bursts, but only when pushed beyond the red line by an exalted expert pilot (Sigma).*
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Double Damage [2 Points] – *Armed with top-of-the-line rail guns, lasers, and EMP hover-mines.*
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Pass Through Door [1 Point] – *There's no proof the Tzimtzum has ever left Fury, but in theory it could, if there was a Door large enough...*
- Self Healing [1 Point] – *Repaired by a bloodstream of Eidolon-guided nanobots which activate at speeds greater than Mach 1.*

Hotwire, Sigma's Whip [4 Points] – This magically-energized monofilament whip effortlessly slices through nearly anything as it slashes, loops, and extends according to Sigma's mental commands.
Deadly Damage [4 Points]

Sigma's Jumpsuit [13 Points] – An armored jumpsuit laced with sparking veins of blue lightning. Woven from the highest technology and the strongest magic, the shifting suit protects from the great dangers of high speeds.

- Named & Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points] – *Sigma's Jumpsuit changes shape and aesthetic as Sigma does, shifting between a dozen sleek styles.*
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]
- Limited Mold Gossamer Reality [2 Points] – *Sigma's Jumpsuit forms a protective null-bubble around its wearer in the event of a crash, decelerating her and temporarily protecting against explosions and sudden environmental hazards.*
- Confers Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons on Wearer [5 Points]

Stuff

Bad [+1 Point]

Notable locations

The Alpha Pack is an important place-to-be, though it isn't a single stationary location. It's a neck-and-neck cluster of about two dozen of the fastest Racer boomships as they zoom over the ground and through the skies of Fury. While there are plenty of other mobile settlements across this world, many with larger conveyances and greater populations, the Alpha Pack is the brain and heart of Racer civilization – the best of the best. Equal parts racing competition, scouting patrol, and scientific collective, the crews of the Alpha Pack take full advantage of the increased influence of the Eidolon to inspire their inventions, guide their research, and perfect their enlightened engineering. Navigating the swiftest (not necessarily safest) course around Fury isn't easy, requiring lightning-quick calculations to duck beneath deadly super-storms, dodge hungry Dragnaughts, and harvest lightning strikes for extra power without disintegrating in a fiery smear across the sky. My favorite boomship in the Alpha Pack is the *Hare's Revenge*, a sleek needle of a ship with a hard-working, hard-partying crew. The captain, a rabbit-eared cyborg called Leadfoot, is a rake and a card shark but enjoys showing off for rich passengers, making him an entertaining tour guide if you can grease his furry palm.

Sigma City is the ultimate citadel of the Umbra, woven together from a chaotic blend of magic, super-science, and sentient substances to form an ever-evolving city of twisting towers, shifting streets, and mutant megaliths. It is located on a stormy, volcanically-active mountain range in Fury's northeastern hemisphere, sprouting from the ruins of what was once the planet's greatest metropolis. High up in a skyscraper wrought of thought-responsive volcanic glass and solid

slime, you can revel in a lightning storm and look down at a landscape of yawning chasms, shifting fungal fortifications, and the burnt-out skeletons of "orderly" civilization's decadent downfall. Surprisingly well-known across the multiverse, Sigma City is like Las Vegas for Umbra Masters, capitalizing on the unique metaphysical property of this gossamer reality whereby a strong connection to the Umbra can be formed simply by remaining still for a little while. Bet a genocide worth of soul gems in a single hand of chaos-cards! Flash-evolve and exfoliate in the luxurious mutation pools! Take in a show... okay, there really aren't any shows, but the local Myxogloth choir is hauntingly beautiful. There's serious work going on too; in back-alley hovels and skyscrapers alike, the city is filled with ritual rooms, hidden laboratories, and meditation chambers designed to enable blissful, maddening communion with the great cosmic force of chaos and change. There are no laws and no police, though somehow a population of mutants, madmen, and mold-things manage to coexist in a very dog-eat-dog but ultimately sustainable society. Several dozen hovering Dragnaughts guard the city like ominous albeit lazy watchdogs, though these particular Dragnaughts have been conditioned to avoid any ship bearing a certain energy signature – a form of security clearance code known only to the high priests, the city's sovereign, and those visiting with her explicit invitation. Despite the name, Sigma City has little to do with Sigma Heisenberg's personal tastes or political aims. The mutant wizards and Myxogloth shamans who take care of the place wisely dedicated the city to their sovereign, and pay her daily homage in an array of bizarre prayers and disturbing sacrificial rites. I'm not sure she even knows what atrocities go on in her name – I hope not.

Thunderbolt Station is a low orbit space station the size of a small city – the product of years of tense but fruitful diplomacy and cooperation between Fury's humanoid Racers and the lightning-like Luminaries. While the fine structure of the Eidolon is well-ingrained to the station's very being by virtue of its prodigious orbital speed around Fury, cracks are beginning to show in the walls of this lofty nest. Boasting the most advanced engineering in this gossamer reality, the station is an excellent place to buy some top-of-the-line tech or refit your boomship, but only if you can pay their out-of-this-world prices. Tradable commodities are the currency of choice; stuff like rare elements (harvested at risk of great peril from the Umbra-infested underground), deuterium (harvested at risk of great peril from Fury's stormy seas), and extant technology (harvested at risk of great peril from anyone who still has something worth taking) – you get the idea. This bloody, risk-fueled economy is marked by aggressive bartering between the "high-bloods" (the "haves", those who live in orbit, mostly Luminaries and robber barons) and the "quick-bloods" (the "have-nots", those who live fast and die fast, mostly Racers), giving Thunderbolt Station more than its fair share

of political intrigue, dirty-dealing, and threats of insurrection. The Station is commanded by a council of tech magnates and industrial powers, much more corporate than compassionate. The council Chairman, a paranoid and bellicose bastard named Ziro Zarren, has recently moved Thunderbolt Station into a much more militaristic posture, making sweeping territorial claims, tightening trade restrictions, and imposing punitive docking fees upon hard-up Racers under threat of black-listing and destruction. Thunderbolt Station gets its name from its weapon of choice – an immense rail gun, dubbed the Hand of Zeus, equipped with a psychic-assisted, Eidolon-attuned targeting computer than can hit any ship with a thinking pilot on its side of the planet. They say the only way to dodge a thunderbolt is to fly on wild instinct faster than the targeting computer can calculate, but so far only one speedster testing that theory has lived to finish their race –Sigma Heisenberg. At present, the primary Door into Fury opens from a maintenance closet into one the station's emergency drop-pod bays; if you're desperate you can rig a pod to give you a ride down to the planet's surface, but just remember that a rough re-entry can make even the toughest Gossamer Lord lose his lunch. Buckle up!

Final Thoughts

Fury deserves its name. It's a fast and dangerous place, defined by a bizarre yet inescapable dynamic between the two great cosmic forces that defines every movement, action, and inaction. Visit if you like, but be ready to move faster than you've ever moved before – because Fury waits for no one.

~ Yaeger Zane

Domain	
Technology Level:	Fusion
Magic Level:	Magic Works Alongside Technology
Security:	Restricted Access [2 Points] (viable Doors are exceedingly scarce)
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: Sigma Heisenberg)
Control:	Control of Time Flow [2 Points]
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Powerful/Weak* Umbra – Weak/Powerful* Wrighting – Blocked
Special*:	**Live Fast or Die Hard* – In Fury, the strengths of the Eidolon and Umbra correlate directly to one's speed; the faster something is moving the more closely attuned it becomes to the Eidolon, and the slower something is moving the more closely attuned it becomes to the Umbra. Objects and characters are affected according to the following chart depending on their equivalent speed (or lack thereof): Stationary for one hour or more ◎ Integral to the Umbra [4 Points] Average speeds ◎ Linked to the Umbra [2 Points] Mobility speeds ◎ Connected to the Umbra [1 Point] Double Speed ◎ Neutral Engine Speed ◎ Connected to the Eidolon [1 Point] Lightning Speed ◎ Linked to the Eidolon [2 Points] Relativistic Speed ◎ Integral to the Eidolon [4 Points] These speed-related Qualities are listed as a benchmark; objects and characters do not need to have a speed-related Quality in order to be so affected (e.g., a character piloting a "mundane"/non-Artifact boomship zipping along at the equivalent of Lightning Speed would still be affected as if Linked to the Eidolon [2 Points])

How to Use Fury

- Let's race! Fury is a world of fast ships, deadly hazards, and plenty of excuses to push a boomship past the red line. Enjoy impossible races over a ruined world, threading through insane shifting terrain, blitzing past hungry Dragnaughts, and dodging orbital thunderbolts by the narrowest of margins. Fuel the excitement!

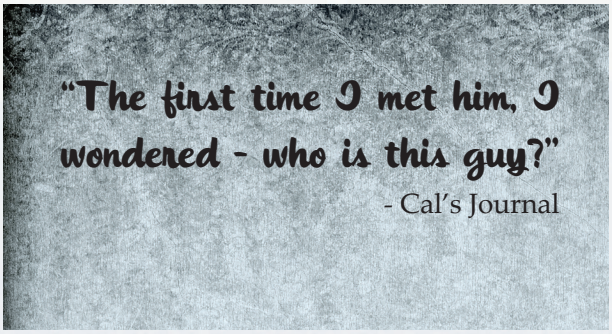
- The Invisible Rally is a relatively new tradition but is fast becoming the most insane gambling event in the multiverse. Hosted every 13 years (give or take, for the time itself is a mutable nothingness), a handful of reckless but wealthy Gossamer Lords gather in wild Sigma City to wager the infinite treasures of the gods on the most ludicrous events imaginable. Chaos-cards! Boomship racing! Strip plov-naga! Soul-shard dueling! Death dice! Have some high-stakes fun.

- Whatever happened to Fury to make it this way is nearly inconceivable – what could shred away an entire gossamer reality, render the last surviving planet a geocentric focus of the universe, and completely redefine the dynamic between the Eidolon and the Umbra?! Researching the calamitous history of Fury could be an entire campaign in and of itself. Perhaps it was the work of a reality-twisting "god". Perhaps it was all a "natural" phenomenon, a product of gossamer reality simply unraveling and reconfiguring under the terrible pressure of Shadow all around. Perhaps an ancient Dwimmerlaik artifact is to blame, and only a delve into the Umbra-saturated center of the planet can reveal the dire machinery.

- Sigma Heisenberg, a notorious rogue of a Gossamer Lady, has stolen (or perhaps liberated) an artifact from the clutches of one of the characters' mentors. Heavily shielded from the usual Wrighting and scrying efforts, the only way to track Sigma down and retrieve the prize is to commandeer a boomship and catch her.

- This world isn't all about speed. After a crash, or as part of an important expedition, slow down and spelunk into the deep dark Umbra-saturated bowels of Fury – riddled with entropic oozes, bizarre Myxogloth civilizations, and maddening gremlin warrens, the underworld of this world is a place where mutation is the norm and the only constant is change – and lots of it.

Yaeger Zane, Outlaw Scholar of the Grand Stair



Yaeger Zane is an adventurer and wild man, perpetually exploring new Gossamer worlds and reveling in the thrills of discovery as he combats his one true foe: boredom. His powers of shape shifting allow him to adopt a myriad of guises and disguises as he wanders the Grand Stair. In his true form Yaeger is a ruggedly handsome, well-tanned man with long dirty-blonde hair and a scruffy beard; his natural-born wings hang from his back, with the lustrous brown and white plumage of a golden eagle.

Yaeger exudes the carefree attitude of a bon vivant, always cracking jokes and smiling for pictures, but he is, at his core, a primal killer. Yaeger unapologetically enjoys hunting big game across the multiverse, and his skills with a panoply of firearms and bladed weapons are supremely lethal. That said, most of the time he plays nice. Most of the time.

Yaeger Zane [100 Point Version]

This is Zane just starting out – a new but fearless Warden of the Grand Stair who has just begun to chart the Gossamer worlds and make a name for himself as an explorer. In the beginning Yaeger was a bit more subtle, honing the skills of disguise and adaptation necessary to blend in to a never-ending gauntlet of alien cultures and strange lands.

Attributes

Psyche – 5 Points
Strength – 15 Points
Endurance – 10 Points
Warfare – 25 Points

Powers

Lesser Shape Shifting [15 Points] – Yaeger can use his still-developing shape shifting abilities to retract his natural wings into his body and adopt the form of a "normal" human. Taking this guise also makes his appearance more mundane and inconspicuous, concealing his myriad tattoos and muddling his facial features, making it easy for him to blend in when traveling. Even when shifting, Yaeger has trouble preventing tufts of white and brown feathers from sprouting at his temples, so he keeps his hair long to hide this distinguishing characteristic.

Warden of the Grand Stair [10 Points]

Artifacts & Creatures

Heart's Blood, Yaeger's Big Knife [1 Point]

- Limited Double Damage [1 Point] – This oversized bone-handled bowie knife draws its lethal energy from the spirits of the powerful creatures it kills, and must be "fed" every week with the heart's blood of an apex predator; otherwise, the knife becomes mundane until fed again. *(Yaeger later shatters this knife in battle and replaces it with Midas, his golden spear).*

Captain Blammo, Yaeger's Revolver [3 Points]

- Double Damage [2 Points] – each bullet infused with destructive rune magic.
- Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point] – Captain Blammo makes its own ammunition; any roughly bullet-shaped gossamer matter wadded into one of the revolver's six chambers becomes a fully-functional .45 caliber round within 4 hours. The adaptive ammunition crafted on a Gossamer world in this fashion will function and fire properly even if the physics of the world do not support the use of gunpowder and bullets.

Wings [14 Points] – In his true form, Yaeger Zane has angelic feathered wings with white and brown plumage resembling that of a golden eagle, allowing him to fly as fast as a sports car.

- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Idiosyncratic Quality [10 Points]

Yaeger's Belt Buckle [1 Point]

- Contains an Icon [1 Point] – a device of last resort, Yaeger's large, ornate belt buckle can connect him with an estranged but powerful person whom he won't even name.

Other gear: In addition to his artifacts, Yaeger routinely carries a small arsenal of deadly albeit "mundane" weaponry, and buys or steals anything else he needs from the Gossamer worlds he visits. He likes big rifles, quirky knives, and recklessly powerful explosives.

Stuff

Good [+1 Point]

Yaeger Zane [250 Point Version]

This is Yaeger Zane in his prime. Wielding his storied golden glaive, Yaeger Zane the crazy hunter is a reckless celebrity, known for taking trophies from the greatest of beasts across the multiverse. The widespread publication of his irreverent but fascinating series of travelogues has made him a well-known and a little notorious among the Gossamer Lords and those who travel the Grand Stair. In love and war alike he is known to be both lucky and good.

Attributes

Psyche – 25 Points
Strength – 40 Points
Endurance – 35 Points
Warfare – 50 Points

Powers

Cantrips [5 Points]: Flare, Jam, Open, Nullify, Quicken

Shape Shifting [35 Points] – Yaeger uses his shape shifting powers to blend in among native populations and adapt his physiology to the environment of the Gossamer worlds he visits. He especially enjoys learning the forms of local predators in order to hunt like they do (though for serious battles he still prefers fighting with firearms and melee weapons). Even when shifting, Yaeger has trouble preventing tufts of white and brown feathers from sprouting at his temples, so he keeps his hair long to hide this distinguishing characteristic.

Warden of the Grand Stair [10 Points]

Artifacts & Creatures

Midas, Yaeger's Golden Glaive [6 Points]

- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Named and Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points] – While typically a golden glaive, *Midas* can shape-shift into various pointy and bladed weapons, ranging in size from a small spike to an immense longspear.
- *Captain Blammo, Yaeger's Revolver* [3 Points]
- Double Damage [2 Points] – each bullet infused with destructive rune magic.
- Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point] – Captain Blammo makes its own ammunition; any roughly bullet-shaped gossamer matter wadded

into one of the revolver's six chambers becomes a fully-functional .45 caliber round within 4 hours. The adaptive ammunition crafted on a gossamer world in this fashion will function and fire properly even if the physics of the world do not support the use of gunpowder and bullets.

Wings [26 Points] – In his true form, Yaeger Zane has angelic feathered wings with white and brown plumage resembling that of a golden eagle, allowing him to fly as fast as a sports car.

- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points] – Yaeger has toughened his natural wings to the point that he can use them as protection, shielding the rest of his body from blasts and blows.
- Idiosyncratic Quality x 2 [20 Points]

Yaeger's Belt Buckle [1 Point]

- Contains an Icon [1 Point] – a device of last resort, Yaeger's large, ornate belt buckle can connect him with an estranged but powerful person whom he won't even name.

Other gear: In addition to his artifacts, Yaeger routinely carries a small arsenal of deadly albeit "mundane" weaponry, and buys or steals anything else he needs from the Gossamer worlds he visits. He likes big rifles, quirky knives, and recklessly powerful explosives.

Allies

Gossamer World Allies [1 Point x 6] – *Gossamer Exes.* Yaeger Zane is a shameless polyamorous playboy who has left a long and messy trail of ex-lovers across the multiverse. Most of this spurned lot think he's a rake and a heel, but at any given time there are at least half a dozen former paramours willing to help Yaeger out of a jam, let him crash on their couch, or lend their aid in one more caper, for old times' sake.

Domains

The Awesome Aerie, Yaeger's Tower [4 Points] – Yaeger maintains a Tower in the highly magical common-ground Gossamer world known as Verse Arcanum, located along the Witch's Spine – a popular mountain range where several other neighborly Gossamer Lords also maintain Towers as personal sanctuaries and vacation homes. Yaeger's Tower is a twisted lodge-like spiral cobbled together from rough-cut hardwood logs and polished giant-bones, filled with hunting trophies from across the multiverse and ostentatious furnishings maximally conducive to Yaeger's tastes for relaxation and debauchery. Yaeger re-imagines the contents of the Tower with every visit, though he often brags about his zero-gravity solarium, the protective perimeter of buxom succubi-gargoyles, and his backyard paddock for winged unicorns. The Tower perches high on a mountaintop and overlooks Yaeger's personal *demesne* – a jagged expanse of rocky peaks and densely forested highlands which Yaeger allows to grow wild so that he can enjoy the untamed magical beasts who dwell there.

- Restricted Access [2 Points]
- Personal Domain [1 Point]
- Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to Yaeger's Tower and surrounding *desmesne*)

Stuff

Good [+4 Points]

Yaeger Zane [500 Point Version]

This is Yaeger Zane pushed to the limit. Fueled by the influence of a powerful and primordial artifact, Yaeger at this stage is a candle burning too brightly, in danger of burning out altogether. The other Gossamer Lords whisper that he has grown too dangerous to be allowed to roam about unchecked, and even Yaeger himself yearns for simpler, happier days.

Attributes

Psyche – 30 Points
Strength – 65 Points
Endurance – 40 Points
Warfare – 115 Points

Powers

Cantrips [10 Points]: Flare, Focus, Grasp, Jam, Open, Nullify, Pain, Quicken, Shut, Sureness

Exalted Shape Shifting [85 Points] – Yaeger uses his shape shifting powers to blend in among native populations and adapt his physiology to the environment of the Gossamer worlds he visits, effortlessly growing gills or other specialized organs as needed. At this highest level, Yaeger has learned powerful tricks including becoming

a gigantic adamantine version of himself, transforming into a flock of lesser creatures, or even adopting the form of fearsome monsters of legend when he really wants to scare the pants off of someone. Lately he has taken to prowling the Gossamer worlds in beastly form for longer periods, and there's worry he may be losing some of his personhood to the primal lure of bloodlust and animal instinct.

Master of the Grand Stair [35 Points]
Sorcery [15 Points]

Artifacts & Creatures

Midas, Yaeger's Golden Glaive [6 Points]

- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Named and Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points] – While typically a golden glaive, *Midas* can shape-shift into various pointy and bladed weapons, ranging in size from a small spike to an immense longspear.

Captain Blammo, Yaeger's Revolver [3 Points]

- Double Damage [2 Points] – each bullet infused with destructive rune magic.
- Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point] – Captain Blammo makes its own ammunition; any roughly bullet-shaped gossamer matter wadded into one of the revolver's six chambers becomes a fully-functional .45 caliber round within 4 hours. The adaptive ammunition crafted on a gossamer world in this fashion will function and fire properly even if the physics of the world do not support the use of gunpowder and bullets.

Rift-Ripper, Yaeger's Chain-Sword [39 Points]

Yaeger lifted this oversized chain-sword from the dismembered corpse of a mad god, and he still does not fully comprehend what he's found (or, rather, what found *him*). Yaeger calls his chain-sword *"Subtlety"* in jest, though the sentient weapon insists its name is *"Rift-Ripper."* Yaeger tries to keep it locked away, unleashing it for only the most apocalyptic battles, but more and more *Rift-Ripper* has been demanding to come out and play. This artifact is to blame for Yaeger's recent rise in power, though even as the weapon funnels greater energies into him, Yaeger subconsciously yearns to escape its influence, retreating into the oblivion of vice and shape shifting walkabouts.

- Able to Speak and Reason [2 Points] – *Rift-Ripper* has a sinister, primal mind of its own. It hungers for carnage and ruin, constantly urging its wielder to stop talking and let it rip.
- Capable of Hanging a Spell [1 Point] – commonly hanging a Teleport spell.
- Contains Named and Numbered Cantrips [2 Points] – *Rift-Ripper* knows the Cantrips *Fracture, Glitch, Invigorate, Jam, Loosen, Open,* and *Shut*, and uses them at its whim.
- Destructive Damage [8 Points] – the chain-sword roars like a demon, belching gouts of blue hellfire as it opens up both physical substance and the background fabric of reality.
- Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 Points] – *Rift-Ripper* is especially adept at detecting the presence or imminent approach of the Dwimmerlaik, and seems intent on avoiding them.
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] – *Rift-Ripper* has its own beliefs about what should be connected and what should not; when 'revved up', the weapon acts on its own to magically or physically sever connections (e.g. by destroying bridges, or crumbling staircases) or create new pathways (e.g. by sawing holes in walls, or burning a path through the jungle).
- Linked to the Grand Stair [2 Points] – *Rift-Ripper* is intimately connected to the Power of the Grand Stair, giving its wielder frightening proficiency and power when it comes to Creating New Doors, Bridging Doors, and Severing Doors.
- Mobility [1 Point] – the chain-sword, when active and roaring, can noisily and messily chew its way across floors and up stairs, roaming about while it leaves destruction in its wake.
- Named & Numbered Alternate Forms [2 Points] – *Rift-Ripper's* true form is a huge silver key of alien design and unknown

origin, though it has also spent much of its existence in the form of a large two-handed scythe. Its chain-sword form *"Rift-Ripper"* is an invention of its own – a disguise it adopted to conceal its nature and whereabouts from the Dwimmerlaik.

- Pass Through Door [1 Point] – *Rift-Ripper* is meant to travel the Grand Stair, and wants to.
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- True Name is Secret [4 Points] – *Subtlety/Rift-Ripper* has gone by many names over the eons, though its first was *Opener*. Its true name is hidden by the power of the Grand Stair.

Wings [44 Points] – In his true form, Yaeger Zane has massive angelic wings, though his original white and brown feathers have now taken on a metallic sheen of copper and gold.

- Double Damage [2 Points] – Yaeger's razor-sharp feathers can slice through a tank.
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points] – Yaeger has toughened his wings to the point of adamantine-hard protection from nearly any assault. When shifting, he molds his wings across his body like armor to retain this functionality.
- Lightning Speed [8 Points] – Yaeger can fly as fast and furious as a jet aircraft.
- Idiosyncratic Quality x 3 [30 Points]

Yaeger's Belt Buckle [1 Point]

- Contains an Icon [1 Point] – a device of last resort, Yaeger's large, ornate belt buckle can connect him with an estranged but powerful person whom he won't even name. Okay, he might just admit that this person is Sigma Heisenberg, the love of his life he can never catch.

Other gear: In addition to his artifacts, Yaeger routinely carries a small arsenal of deadly albeit "mundane" weaponry, and buys or steals anything else he needs from the Gossamer worlds he visits. He likes big rifles, quirky knives, and recklessly powerful explosives.

Allies

Gossamer World Allies [1 Point x 12] – *Gossamer Exes.* Yaeger Zane is a shameless polyamorous playboy who has left a long and messy trail of ex-lovers across the multiverse. Most of this spurned lot think he's a rake and a heel, but at any given time there are at least a dozen former paramours willing to help Yaeger out of a jam, let him crash on their couch, or lend their aid in one more caper, for old times' sake.

Domains

The Awesome Aerie, Yaeger's Tower [6 Points] – Yaeger maintains a Tower in the highly magical common-ground Gossamer world known as Verse Arcanum, located along the Witch's Spine – a popular mountain range where several other Gossamer Lords maintain Towers as personal sanctuaries and vacation homes. Yaeger's Tower is a twisted spiral cobbled together from rough-cut hardwood logs and polished giant-bones, filled with hunting trophies from across the multiverse and ostentatious furnishings conducive to Yaeger's tastes for relaxation and debauchery. Yaeger re-imagines the contents of the Tower with every visit, though he often brags about his zero-gravity solarium, the protective perimeter of buxom succubi-gargoyles, and his backyard paddock for winged unicorns. The Tower perches high on a mountaintop and overlooks Yaeger's personal *demesne* – a jagged expanse of rocky peaks and densely forested highlands which Yaeger allows to grow wild so that he can enjoy the untamed magical beasts who dwell there.

- Guarded [4 Points] – Yaeger has augmented the security of his lodge with multiple layers of defensive spells, wards, and a protective watchdog – an ancient green dragon called Murdock who has agreed to watch over the place for a century as payment to Yaeger for losing a bet.
- Personal Domain [1 Point]
- Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to Yaeger's Tower and surrounding *demesne*)

Stuff

Bad [+4 Points] - Yaeger's luck has taken an ominous turn for the worse since he met *Rift-Ripper*.

How to Use Yaeger Zane

- *Yaeger as an Ally* – Yaeger Zane makes a great ally, always happy to share his extensive knowledge of the Gossamer worlds and provide tips on how to navigate the Grand Stair. Yaeger will even tag along on adventures if they sound interesting, though he's easily distracted by a pretty face and isn't terribly responsible. Even if he recklessly abandons his allies in the face of peril, Yaeger is the type of guy who will just show up later with some beers like nothing's wrong and scoff at any suggestion that he apologize for anything.

- *Yaeger as an Enemy* – It would take serious antagonism to turn Yaeger Zane into an enemy, but once he comes to believe that another Gossamer Lord is an @$$ho!e, Yaeger can be a relentless, albeit juvenile, antagonist. An angry Yaeger might plague his enemies by setting traps, pulling potentially lethal pranks, and poisoning the populations of entire worlds against his nemeses on the off chance that they'll wander in and have a very bad day. Or he might just part their hair from a click away with a shot from his Barrett 50 cal, because he can.

- *Objectives* – Notoriously uninterested in prestige or station among the other Gossamer Lords, Yaeger Zane craves little more than exploration and adventure. He has a rough reputation as a spoiler and an outlaw, though in private his peers might grudgingly admit the worth of his widely-disseminated (albeit unscholarly) travelogues, if for no other reason than they provide ample fodder for argument, debate, and discourse.

- *Notorious Killer* - Remember that, despite all his irreverent quips and goofball antics, Yaeger Zane is a killer. Use him to do the dirty work of the other Gossamer Lords who might be too refined to bloody their own hands with assassinations and wet-work deep in the metaphorical jungles of the Gossamer worlds. Keep in mind that Yaeger is nobody's lackey, but if the cause is necessary and if the right person asks him nicely (or pays him in the right coin), he will do what needs to be done. Use him as a *deus ex machina* if needs be, emerging with the severed head of a stubborn villain just in time to save the day and allow the characters to move the plot along to the next part of the adventure.

- *Broker of Information and Entertainment* - Yaeger Zane is a good source for background information, exposition, or directions to the characters about where to go and how they might get there. But, moreover, wacky and wild Yaeger is an excellent way to *show* the characters how much fun they could be having. Hey, let's go mess with that Annunaki! Who wants to ride a dracolich? Check out this stolen hover-tank! Let Yaeger be the bad kid who gets them all in trouble.

- *Role Model* - Most of all, use Yaeger to encourage the characters to get out and explore the wonders of the multiverse for themselves. To be known, the Grand Stair must be walked!

How to Use Rift-Ripper, the Opener of Ways

- This legendary artifact has a deep and intrinsic connection to the Grand Stair. It is ancient and primordial, and there is no known record of its construction or its original creator. It has been called many names – *Subtlety, Rift-Ripper, Render, Death's Knock, Door-Maker,* and *Opener*, to list a few. Apocryphal accounts tout it as the ultimate key, or as the embodiment of the scythe of Death itself, or as a natural self-defense mechanism for the Grand Stair. This may be true, or it may all be smoke and mirrors to inflate the ego of a sentient weapon driven mad by a long life of destruction.

- *Rift-Ripper* does what it wants. Anyone who thinks that wielding this potent implement will make them the all-powerful ruler of the Grand Stair is sorely mistaken.

- There is a legendary rumor that, should the silver key *Opener* ever be plunged into "the" Door at the heart of the Labyrinth, it would trigger the next great cataclysmic re-structuring of the Grand Stair, potentially shuffling the connections of all Doors, sealing off vast swaths of known multi-space, and re-opening the ancient ways which were once severed to locked away the Dwimmerlaik. Whether this legend is true or not, just on the chance it might be accurate many powerful beings want to obtain *Opener* themselves so that they can study it, or use it themselves, or destroy it once and for all.

- *Free Yaeger!* - If you are playing with the 500-Point version of Yaeger Zane, the characters may embark on a quest to liberate Yaeger from the ruinous influence of this legendary weapon. While *Rift-Ripper* isn't necessarily "evil" in a cosmic sense, it certainly isn't "good", and it certainly doesn't care about Yaeger's well-being as it slowly drives him mad and overtakes his will. Yaeger has become addicted to the heady rush of power that wielding this primordial implement brings and he won't give it up readily, even if confronted with truth and logic in an intervention. Likewise, *Rift-Ripper* will do everything in its power to keep its hold on Yaeger, including spurring him to murderous violence so that it can let rip and destroy its detractors. There are at least three possible ways the characters could separate the two. One option is to discover the True Names of both *Rift-Ripper* and Yaeger Zane, and use the Invocation Power to sever their current bond; this should be exceedingly difficult, as *Rift-Ripper*'s True Name is secret by *almost* any standard. Another option is to convince *Rift-Ripper* to 'adopt' another owner through displays of mystical prowess and mastery of the Grand Stair. Another option, dangerous in the extreme, would be to use *Rift-Ripper* in the heart of the Labyrinth and just see what happens (hint: an epic disaster). Dare they lay hands on this most perilous of artifacts in order to save Yaeger's free spirit?

- *Yaeger Zane Unchained* – If the characters can liberate (the 500-Point version of) Yaeger from *Rift-Ripper*'s influence, Yaeger loses the Master of the Grand Stair ability, reverting back to a "humble" Warden of the Grand Stair. This would also remove all of Yaeger's Bad Stuff, giving him Zero Stuff until such time as he can find good luck again.

The Grand Stair

... stretches behind the scenes of the multiverse, the Doors upon its unfathomably vast span leading the way to Gossamer worlds of limitless variety and infinite possibility. Everything imaginable is out there to explore, if only one can find it.

In his wild adventures across the multiverse, the wily and notorious Gossamer Lord Yaeger Zane has seen it all: faerie realms, nightmare realms, post-apocalyptic wastelands, vast intergalactic empires, flooded planets, hollow planets, city planets, junkyard planets, cloud worlds, magic worlds, dragon worlds, two-dimensional worlds, worlds where poetry is power, and at least one island where you can totally ride an aether-controlled T-rex with steam-powered battle-arms. Yaeger's been there and done that, and his assembled travelogues full of lush description and sly advice are an indispensable resource for all who wish to roam.

This *Gossamer Worlds Compendium* brings together in a single volume TWENTY astonishingly unique and impossibly diverse Gossamer worlds, including the never-before-seen *Gossamer Worlds: Fury*. These are just a few of the infinite possibilities within *Lords of Gossamer and Shadow* by Jason Durall, powered by Erick Wujcik's Diceless Roleplaying.

RiP

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