

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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## Aethersaur Island

*“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*

### Description

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 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 Shadowmonster 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.

## Typical Denizens

Humanity survived the convergence, barely. 80,752 citizens of an enlightened Edwardian Earth-world found themselves 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

## 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.

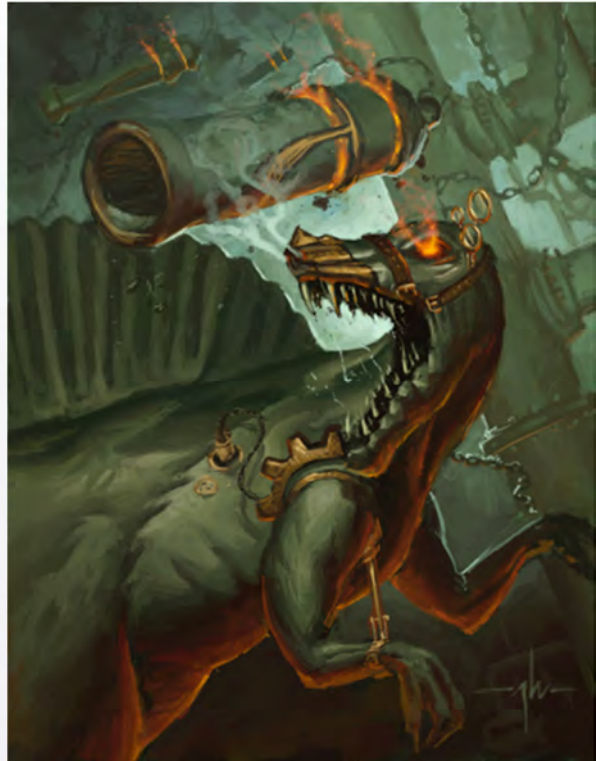
and raised in this strange and savage land.

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 stegosaurus, 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 get to the rampaging steam-powered cyborg t-rex. They call her Queen Victoria, and she is 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 stature, 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, foraging 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

## *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.

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 through 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 of roaring aethersaurs as well as a rudimentary airport 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 aether-tech.

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

### Aethersaur Island Domain Table

<b>Technology Level:</b>	Steam
<b>Magic Level:</b>	Magic Works Alongside Technology (aethertechnology*)
<b>Security:</b>	Communication Barrier [1 Point]
<b>Type:</b>	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: Cyrano)
<b>Control:</b>	Control of Time Flow [2 Points]
<b>Influence on the Powers:</b>	Eidolon – Average Umbra – Strong Wrighting – Average
<b>*Special:</b>	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.