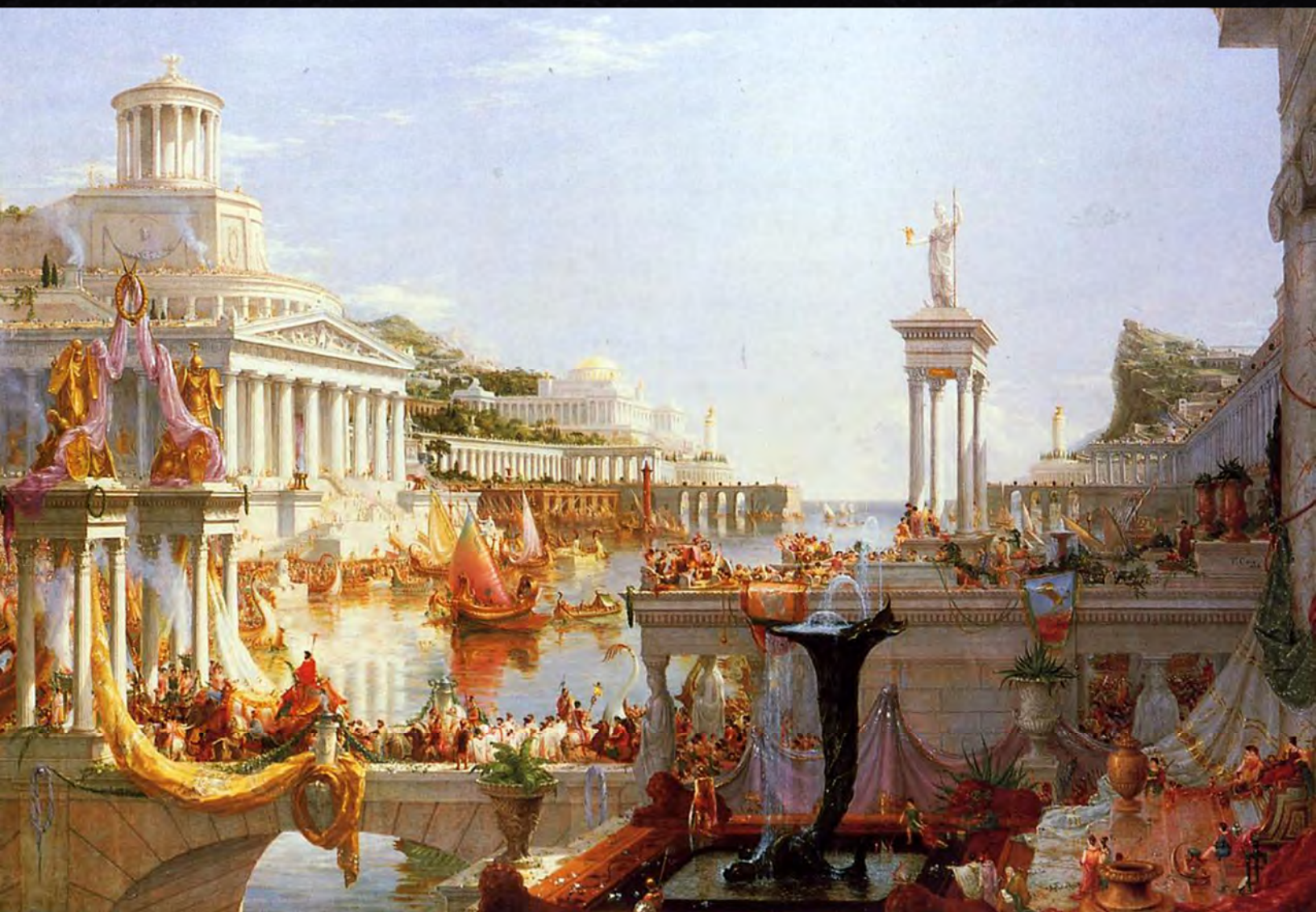


Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: Empyreia



by Matt Banach





Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Empyrea

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

Empyrea

“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.” – 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

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.

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.



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, Empyrean 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 (Empyrean 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 elixirs 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



Allfather Augustus Bellaphon

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 “unblessed” 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 Emphyrean 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 Emphyrea 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 says 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 Emphyrea'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 Emphyrea 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 Emyrea 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 Emyrean 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 Emyrean 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 Emyrea 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.

of all time – but be cautious. And if you see that brunette, tell her the man with the golden javelin sends his regards.

If you visit Empyrea, savor it – it is a truly beautiful world with a host of splendors, and my favorite vacation spot

~ 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.

