

# Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

# Gossamer Worlds:

# Nexopolis



by Matt Forbeck





Rite Publishing Presents:

# Gossamer Worlds: Nexopolis

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# Nexopolis







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# Foreword

Welcome to Nexopolis!

Now go home!

Yeah, I know. That never works on anyone. If you figured out how to get here on your own, then you already have far more curiosity than is good for you. When it comes to this sprawling patch of land I call home, you're doomed, and in more ways than one.

You were the moment you came through that Door.

If you didn't come here on your own, go find whoever brought you, and beg them to take you back. It's just not safe for you to be wandering around on your own in a place like this.

Honestly, you're fresh meat being waved in front of starving wolves.

If you wandered in here all by your lonesome, then do us both a favor and turn yourself around. Go back to where you came from and forget you ever saw this place. I hear a bracer of good, stiff drinks helps with that. Tomorrow, you can wake up hungover and convince yourself this was all a terrible dream.

But you're not going to do that, are you?

Well, you're not the only one. It's far too typical, in my experience. Once you set eyes on Nexopolis, it's damned hard to look away.

It's like being touched by faery, as Finnian used to say. After that happens to you, you've been ruined for anything else. No matter how horrible it might be, you're a goner.

Go ahead and protest. Tell me you can leave any time you like.

I was there once myself. I uttered the same damn lies.

And yet, here I stand.

We're not alone.

But that's why Finnian ordered me to set up a welcoming committee. Newbies like you who wander into our fair city are—to put it as politely as I can manage—a nuisance. You wander in and gum up the works of our little civilization's elegant machinery.

It's not intentional. Well, in most cases. You seem like a good person, and from the look on your face you'll be too busy goggling at all our wonders to

cause much harm. At least on purpose. But that's my point.

Like most cities, Nexopolis works best for those who understand it, and through no fault of your own, you don't fall into that category. Not yet.

Right now, your gawking makes you a speed bump in the fast lane of Nexopolis life. And if you don't know what that means, you're only proving me right.

Ah, but that's where I can help. I'm here to haul you out of the middle of the street, plant you in a safe spot, get your head situated, and point you in the right direction.

I used to try to do this one at a time, but it just got to be too painful. I mean, can you imagine having to tell people the same things over and over again? To answer the same silly, ignorant questions time after time?

If I wanted that, I'd have become a tour guide or a school teacher.

Nothing against tour guides, mind you.

But Finnian charged me with educating our visitors, with bringing the speed bumps up to speed. And he pays well.

So I wrote this book. This way, I figure, I only have to answer the most inane and ridiculous questions once. The good questions, you can ask me yourself.

After you read this book.

Seriously, I'm here to help you. That's my job. But if you ask me a question that's answered in these pages, I'm only going to answer you with a question of my own.

"Have you read the book?"

And I'll know if you're lying. Not because I have some kind of magical power that lets me know that kind of thing. (I might, sure, but I'm not saying.) But because your question has already answered mine.

Right?

Fine. I'll try to go slow. I'll hit all the high points. And I do promise to try to answer any decent questions you have when you're done.

But not before then.

Get reading.

— Willa

# Welcome to Nexopolis

This used to be a nice place, or so I'm told. I didn't live here back then. It was long before I was born.

When I say "this," I mean the planet. This Gossamer world, including the fair city of Nexopolis, in which we sit.

And if you don't know what a Gossamer world is, my friend, you need a lot more help than I can provide you in this tiny tome of mine. Do terms like Umbra and Grand Stair and Doors confuse you too?

If so, then seriously, just stop right now and put this book down. Come find me. I have a mind-blowing pamphlet full of clues for those as utterly clueless as you.

Well, okay. It's less a pamphlet and more a hard-cover book of 160 pages packed with gorgeous, full-color illustrations, but you'll thank me for it. I accept gratuities in the form of drinks and favors. Preferably both.

Back to business. In this world's heyday, they used to call it Tasnimia, something that loosely translates to Paradise. It was as fantastic and wonderful a place as you'd ever be blessed enough to see on the best day of your life.

But that was before the Dwimmerlaik invaded. That was way back during the Great War with them, and I'm told that Tasnimia served as the front line in one of the largest battles.

It makes sense. Few places had as many Doors leading into it as Tasnimia. The people in charge back then wanted to make it easy to access from the rest of the Gossamer worlds so they forged as many new Doors between here and the Grand Stair as they could.

They turned it into the most traveled of the known Gossamer worlds. If you opened a Door on the

Grand Stair, chances were better that you'd wind up here than anywhere else.

Which is, of course, how the Dwimmerlaik found it, as well as why they wanted it.

That war destroyed most of the planet, and it took the vast majority of the Doors with it. If you try to open a Door anywhere inside the Grand Stair and discover that it no longer goes anywhere—that there's no corresponding Door on the other side—you might hear someone say you've been "locked out of Paradise." That's why.

There's not much left of Tasnimia, but we've tried to make the most of it. The bombs and poisons and radiation and other horrors the Dwimmerlaik visited on the world all but destroyed it. In the end, they only missed one tiny part of it, an island so small that it managed to escape their attention.

That's what we know today at Nexopolis.

Finnian was one of the survivors, or so the legend goes. He gathered the other survivors—including a handful of resourceful leaders like him—and sealed off the remaining Doors in the world and on this tiny island until they could recover their strength. They hunkered down in an underground bunker, far from the Dwimmerlaik's reach, and they planned for their return.

## The Island

Nexopolis sits on an island in the middle of a vast ocean, far from the sight of any distant shores. It's roughly rectangular, and it only measures about

### Finnian's Keys [2 Points]

These Keys are attuned to Finnian and those he bestows them upon. They will only open the Door that they were created for, and will only work for Finnian and the shop owner. Anyone attuned to a Key can command the Key to work for someone else, but few shop owners will give up such exclusivity. These Keys mark the merchant as one with special status in Nexopolis, a privilege that allows them to operate a Door onto the Grand Stair. There is a responsibility that goes with this privilege, as the blame for any wrongdoing discovered with regards to the Door falls squarely on the merchant's shoulders.

- Psychic Sensitivity [1 Point]
- Pass through Door [1 Point]





*Nexopolis, Finnian's Crown Jewel.*

four miles on its longest side and two on its shortest. You can walk across it without breaking a sweat.

Of course, there aren't too many paths that cut straight across it. There's a ring road that encircles the entire island, and dozens of smaller streets cut in from there at intervals that are either random or the result of city planners seized by madness. The portion of the road that runs along the island's southern and eastern edges looks out over windswept beaches of sand white enough to blind you. They glitter like they're made of ground diamonds, but they're as soft and warm as silk sheets on a sultry night.

We have some of the most perfect weather in any world here—most of the time. We're in a tropical climate that gives us only two seasons: dry and rainy. But the jet stream that rushes around us keeps us from extremes of heat or cold.

I've never heard of snow falling here, outside of a rare and ambitious use of magic that's usually localized to a single yard. In the heart of the dry season, we do get some days that can make you want to find a shady tree under which you can sweat, but the trade winds keep those to a bare minimum.

If I didn't already live here, I'd want to come here to vacation. I'd send you a postcard, and you'd seethe with jealousy.

I'd just stay home during the rainy season if I were you though.

The other name for the rainy season is hurricane season, and just like most things in Nexopolis, it seems there's no reason to do something if

you can't overdo it. The hurricanes here make some of the old-timers wish for the good old days of the war. Winds and rains come racing through here fast enough to carry off anything that's not bolted down tight.

And they bring those poisons with them. Those same winds that protect us most of the year seem to break down in the face of such fury.

Some of the people here think these hurricanes are filled with the ghosts of the Dwimmerlaik killed here during the war. Others are sure they're the harbinger of a new invasion and all the Dwimmerlaik are waiting for is for us to be complacent about such horrors.

There's little chance of that, since it usually takes us several days if not weeks to fix all the damage the storms do. If it wasn't for the system of tunnels that run under the island's surface, the hurricanes might be intolerable, but they allow us to get around in even the worst of the weather.

Of course, because of the nature of Nexopolis, we have the greatest evacuation plan ever. In case of emergency, we all just head for the nearest Door and make our way onto the Grand Stair.

Sure, that's easier said than done. We don't actually have enough magically talented people around to open all the Doors for us. However, most Doors have a Key designed specifically for it and given to a trusted member of our community. Any Door in a retail store, for instance, comes with a Key that also doubles as a license to do business in Nexopolis.



Not every license comes with a Key—they're too valuable and rare to hand out like that—but every Key comes with a license. Those that have them aren't shy about letting their customers know. Most such shops have a photo of the proprietor shaking hands with Finnian as he presents them with their Key.

## The People

We have—at last count—north of twenty thousand people who call Nexopolis home. Plus a number of merchants, vacationers, and other transients that add another five to ten thousand souls to the count, depending on the season. That's a lot of people to get moving on short notice.

That's not to say there are lots of Nexopolis natives who live on the island. With the exception of Finnian and a few of his closest friends, most of us come from someplace else, at least as far as our heritage is concerned. About half of us were born here, although we're all descended from people who immigrated to Nexopolis from other worlds.

Maybe a handful of us are Wardens or other kinds of lords and ladies of various powers. It's damned hard to be sure though. Not everyone with power likes to show off, and there are others who like to pretend they have it, even if they couldn't light a match in one hand without a blazing torch in the other.

The rest of us—whether we're the sort who can open Doors or not—come from worlds beyond this one. With as many Doors as we have on Nexopolis, it's only a short walk from here to most of the major worlds, as well as the most important parts of the Grand Stair.

Some came here on their own. They discovered they could open the Doors all by themselves, and they made the most of that until they settled here. For those folks, Nexopolis seems like a shelter from the storm, a place where they can escape from all the responsibilities that come with having power, whether they wanted it or not.

Others were lured here with promises of a better life—which often wasn't much of a stretch. If your only other option is scratching scrawny potatoes from the mud to keep your family from starving, Nexopolis seems like the full-on paradise this world once was. As romantic as King Arthur's Camelot might seem, they don't have fully-immersive 3D wall screens plastered across the palace's ramparts.

A few may have been dragged here against their will. If they could open Doors and find a way back home, they would, but without a proper guide, that's

next to impossible to manage. Finnian has a repatriation program for such people, but they have to ask to leave, and the kind of bullies who haul people into other worlds often have the power to make sure their victims keep silent about how they were kidnapped. And some of those poor souls don't really want to go home. They want to be here as much as anyone else, just under their own terms.

## The Environment

In just about every other place I've lived—and I've called lots of different worlds home for one stretch or another—they have a saying that goes something like this: "If you don't like the weather, just wait five minutes." It's the kind of thing that's funny once. It's absurd on the face of it, but it contains enough of a grain of truth to keep you chuckling.

With Nexopolis, it's the opposite of that. Most of the year, the weather here is fine. Almost too perfect, in fact. Sunny without blazing heat. Breezy without a chill. Fresh without constant change.

That's the nature of the place. Or at least the way the place's nature has been fashioned. At the behest of the island's residents, Finnian ensures that it stays that way for as long as he can. During the rainy season, his magics can't quite sustain the effort, and that's when the hurricanes come.

Well, I call it his magics. Other people swear that Finnian's command over the arcane isn't all that strong, despite the fact that most everyone here can do at least a little bit of magic—even those of us who can't find their way through a Door with a bazooka. They claim that his office in the Capitol Building gives him access to a weather-control satellite that makes the weather perfect for us as often as its advanced science can manage it.

I don't honestly care how he does it. I can only tell you how well it works—and roughly when. All I can say on top of that is that when he fails, it's time to seek cover.

You know what we call people who get stuck outside during one of our infamous hurricanes? The departed. And they're never heard from again.

During the rest of the year, though, this really is a wonderful place to live. I spend most of my days in shorts and flip-flops, and my greatest concern in my off hours is working on my tan.

Some people wonder how we manage to have such a thriving city on such a small patch of land. For one, we do have a natural spring that provides water to the place, and the air's fresh and clean during the dry season. During the rainy season, the pumps that provide air into our underground network of

tunnels filter it just fine. It can smell a bit canned at times, but it beats sniffing poisons—or the body odor of everyone who’s been stuck underground together for weeks.

We have Doors in the underground too, and we use those to initiate trade with other worlds all year round. That keeps us supplied with fresh food, which is vital in a world that has zero in the way of farmable acreage.

## The Crossroads of Worlds

We don’t have much to trade with other worlds ourselves—other than as a tourist destination for those able to find their way here. But our access to Doors makes us a hub for travel and trade among other worlds.

You want to get from Sengoku to Shatterlight? Sure, you can stroll down the Grand Stair for many miles. Maybe get lost in the Labyrinth on your way. You might even try your luck—and risk your life—in the Agora.

Or you can pop into Nexopolis, walk through a customs warehouse, and be right where you want to be within a few minutes, safe and sound.

The Administration levies a small tariff for the use of our facilities, but when you consider how much easier it is to use our Doors, it doesn’t seem like much. You save so much in travel time, not to mention the increase in safety over going places on your own, that the tariff pays for itself several times over.

Of course, the feature that makes Nexopolis so convenient also makes it the most desirable, not just for travelers but for conquerors. While our weather may not alter all that often, the names of the people who are nominally in charge of the place change more often than your underwear.

Note that I said “nominally” there. The keys to the Master Suite on the top floor of the Capitol Building get swapped around like secret margarita recipes, but control over the penultimate floor stays firmly in Finnian’s hands. He’s not the ruler around here. He’s far more important than that.

He’s the manager.

The rulers of Nexopolis come and go. Some of them depart peaceably. Others leave in pieces instead. But one thing—one person—remains the same.

Finnian abides.

Most of the time, the ruler is the leader of the Gossamer Lords, but sometimes that leader assigns the job to someone else. At the moment, Vala holds that honor herself, but she could hand it off if it becomes too demanding, as she has many times over

the centuries. (I’m told this is the thirty-fourth time she has held the rulership of Nexopolis.) Someone could also take the rulership from her (theoretically), either as a challenge to her status as the head of the Gossamer Lords or just because they want Nexopolis for themselves.

I’m sure Finnian has had a few close calls over the years. Not everyone who decides they want to be in charge of a place like Nexopolis is merciful and kind, after all. But he always manages to figure out a way to prove himself indispensable to them, without having to resort to using his powers and showing them the nearest Door.

That’s one of the main things that’s kept Nexopolis stable over the centuries since it was founded: the fact that no matter who’s in charge, you can depend on Finnian and his employees to keep the place running. It’s that stability that transformed the city from a stage post into a thriving center of business.

The value of a place like Nexopolis is that the people who pass through it know roughly what they can expect when they show up. They’re here to trade goods or to pass through so they can trade with other partners in distant worlds. They pay the tariff with a nod and a smile because they know it’s worth it, that they’re dealing with trusted partners. And they won’t be robbed.

If those travelers had to worry that they might be ripped off as they passed through Nexopolis or, worse yet, get killed for their troubles, they’d be a lot less likely to take a chance on us. They’d head for the Agora instead.

I’ve been to the Agora. It’s a wonderful amazing place, but Nexopolis beats it solid in terms of safety and service. If the Agora’s a stunning bazaar at the crossroads of the worlds, then Nexopolis is the supermarket sitting just off the highway. It might cost you a little bit more to come through here, but we think it’s worth it.

For one thing, no one’s in charge of the Agora. While some might see that as a benefit, what do you do when things go wrong? Who’s responsible? Who’s going to help correct the wrongs and make the troubles right?

In Nexopolis, we handle that for you. And we manage it without bloodshed and war.

That said, we do a ton of business with Agoran merchants. They provide the wildest goods you could imagine, and we make sure they get where they’re going. They handle the retail sales, and we take care of the wholesale.

I don’t mean to insult the Agora by that. It’s my favorite location on the Grand Stair, and if you haven’t been there, you’re missing out on one of the great



wonders of all realities. It's a place that beats with a pulse, one that drives our symbiotic relationship with its people.

Finnian always makes a point of explaining this to anyone who comes into the place. He says they need to know exactly what our value proposition is so they can appreciate it, no matter if they have designs on the Master Suite or not.

In fact, he insisted I include these details in this chapter. I was against it at first myself. "Why bother these poor newbies with details about the inner workings of our city's politics?" I asked.

"Because you never know who the next Master of Nexopolis might be, lass," he said in that brogue of his. "And just as important, you never know who might have his ear. We give him the straight dope, and he'll only wonder what we're trying to hide. He hears the same thing from everyone around him—whether it's an army or an entourage—and it'll get through to him."

I didn't believe him much, and I knew he could tell. When that happens, he always gives me that same wry smile. "Trust me," he said.

And I'll be damned if I didn't. At least enough to write this bit here, which I suppose is exactly what he wanted.

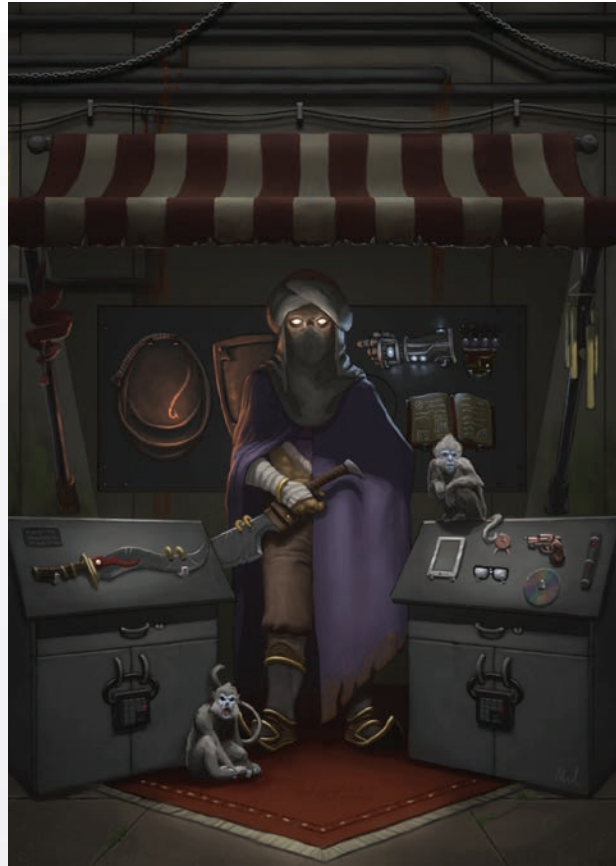
Whether you have designs on this place or not, be sure to keep your eye on that man. He didn't get to keep himself the power behind countless thrones by being stupid. He's as clever as they come.

## Technology and Magic

Nexopolis is renowned among the worlds for being a place in which both sophisticated magic and high technology both function just fine. It's rare to see someone blend the two disciplines in any but the most superficial ways, but separately they work as well here as just about anywhere.

That's important because the more innovative the tech or the spellwork, the higher the price it can command on the open market. In other places where the worlds collide, salespeople often inflate the capabilities of the items they're selling. "Oh, that'll work fine once you get it home," they say. "It's the nature of this world just dampening it down here."

And then once you get the thing home, you discover you've been sold nothing more than a bill of goods. You'd be lucky to even find your way back to wherever it is you bought the thing so you could file a complaint. In Nexopolis, though, your item, device, doohickey, or whatever is guaranteed to work at the highest level possible.



*Tech and magic can be found side-by-side in most of Nexopolis' shops.*

Now, that's not to say the thing's going to function well no matter where you bring it. Some places just don't have the kind of mojo they need in the winding wisps of their Gossamer world's DNA. Yeah, I know worlds don't have DNA, and there's a good chance you don't even know what that means in the first place, but work with me here.

It's all about context. And not just for puzzling out what a three-letter acronym means. Sometimes a smartphone works well in a world that's only reached medieval technology—with the exception of not being able to find a signal or a place to plug in a charger. That means the place can sustain that kind of tech, but the people there haven't figured out how to reach that level of it yet.

Other places, that smartphone's as dead as a rock and a lot less useful. Unless you're trying to skip it along the surface of a lake. Those flat-surfaced phones just bounce right along.

In those cases, it means the world's technology peaked at that medieval level. No matter how much time those folks have on their hands, they're never going to find an app for that—or anything really. The world just can't support it.

The same goes for magic. Some places have the mojo flowing like a roaring waterfall. Others don't even have a trickle in the bottom of a dry creek bed.

And we don't know where you're going to take the things sold here in Nexopolis. We can only guarantee that if you take them to a place where they should work, well, they will. And you can know that because you can test them right here.

That wonderful aspect of our world can be a double-edged razor though. While it's one of the reasons Nexopolis is a preferred trading post, we also know that the Dwimmerlaik could all but destroy our world with that element of it.

One thing about those low-tech, low-magic worlds: You never see them go up in a mushroom cloud, and an army of demons never comes and devours them. Those kinds of weapons just don't work there, and that makes for a much more peaceful land, I'm sure.

It also makes those the kinds of places I wouldn't live if you paid me.

I like getting around town on a flying carpet, and you'll have to pry my tele-lenses off my cold, dead eyeballs. It's hard enough to get around a place without access to the Nexus—that's our instantaneous information network—but can you imagine having to do it with only a stone-tipped spear in your hand?

Call me a spoiled wimp, but I much prefer things here.

Nexopolis just makes everything so much simpler. It's not just that you can get anywhere in the city in a matter of minutes. Or talk with anyone you'd want to with a snap of your fingers. Or that the weather's fantastic for ninety percent of the year.

It's all that, plus the structures Finnian and his staff have put into place and improved on over the years. The Nexus is a primary example of that. It's a high-speed wireless communications network accessible from any spot on the island. If you have the proper credentials and equipment, you can tap into it instantaneously. You can ask at the Hub for access codes, or you can purchase a handheld Nexus device from many different vendors.

Finnian and his engineers had to build that network from scratch after the war destroyed most of the planet. Of course, they were able to import a lot of it from other Gossamer worlds and know it would work here for sure, which made the job a lot simpler.

And then take our banking system. If you've traveled the Grand Stair a lot, you know that one of the troubles of showing up in any random world is the fact that your money is literally no good there. It's impossible to even tell what's going to be valuable in one society over another. I mean, in some plac-

es gold is a rare and precious metal, while in others they use it to line the soles of their shoes.

Nexopolis runs on a system of credits that flow through a banking system trusted by many of the known worlds, particularly those with close trading ties and connections to Nexopolis. We keep an ample stock of otherworldly currencies on hand as well, and we're happy to change them into credits and back into whatever form you like, all for a reasonable fee, far less than what you'd pay a local moneychanger.

It's in our interest to make it easy for you to buy things wherever you go. Or to sell them and accept the local currency in payment, confident that you'll be able to turn those coins and bills into Nexopolis credits.

It's just one of the many ways that Nexopolis makes life better for everyone, no matter which world you call home.

## Style

As you might imagine, the fashions in Nexopolis are all over the map. Our conglomeration of different people gathered together from strange worlds brought about a stylistic clash that feels chaotic at every level. Finnian mitigated this somewhat by introducing a dress code for administration employees that includes shoes, dark pants and a white, button-down shirt for all genders. However, there's a lot of leeway within those restrictions, and people tend to play with them a lot.

Most visitors dress in whatever they came in from back home. Because of the warm weather, many people wear a short-sleeved or sleeveless shirt and shorts or a short skirt. They also tend to wear hats to protect themselves from the sun. There's a brand called Shady Hats that magically screens its wearers from solar radiation, which most of us prefer to wearing sunscreen. Those who live here tend to be well-tanned despite that.

It's not unusual to see people wearing bottoms from one world matched—or mismatched—with tops from another. Many add layers of wearable technology as well. If you don't work for Finnian, no one much cares how you dress, but some of the cattier people can sometimes be heard pointing and laughing at those who do it wrong.

The same mishmash mystique applies to our architecture. While many of the buildings here are high-tech marvels, those are usually only the ones the administration put up in the Capitol District. The stacks in the Shacks are cheaply thrown-up towers of concrete and glass. The Rocks don't feature



much more than rickety shanties made of whatever was at hand.

The Beach, though, features a wide array of architecture from all kinds of places. Each of the homes there was designed to fit the peculiar tastes and sensibilities of its owners. They range from tiki huts to medieval keeps to airy mansions to beached walking yachts.

For all that, there does seem to be an awful lot of neon scattered about the place. Seems we once got in a massive shipment of neon lights that was abandoned in the Hub. Finnian sold them off at cut-rate prices to free up the warehouse space, and they've been turning up on buildings across the island ever since.

## The Law

If you come from a typical Gossamer world, you probably have laws there, rules that prevent people from stealing from or killing each other. We have them here in Nexopolis too, although upholding them isn't usually as simple as it might be back home.

In many worlds, you have a single ruler or a group of people in charge. They not only enforce the laws, they set them down in the first place. They have a small army of people who help them out with that, whether you call them police or the watch or the law.

Not so here in Nexopolis.

We have a justicar with an office on the ground floor of the Capitol. She keeps a squad of deputies with her, but they don't enforce the laws so much as keep the peace.

I understand that Justicar Nataal started out trying to seek justice, but after a few decades of pushing for it, she finally gave up. Nexopolis is a relatively small town with scores of ways in and out of it. That makes it nearly impossible for the justicar's office to bring anyone to, well, justice. It's just too easy for the criminals to get away, and technically once they move beyond this world, they're someone else's problem.

That's not to say that we have a massive issue with crime here. Most people treat each other with respect, although that's not so much because of our culture as from a healthy wish to not start trouble they can't finish. After all, if you steal from one of the merchants here, you'd better be prepared to flee fast. Wherever you can go, they can go too, and if you took something valuable enough, they can pay people to follow you to the end of whichever world you choose to hole up in.

Most of the merchants in town have their own private security teams. They include well-paid professionals, as well as people so dedicated to the job that there's no questioning their loyalties. Sometimes they're family members. Other times they're old friends who have proved themselves over and over. Or who owe the merchant in question more than their lives.

The merchants usually treat their security teams well. It's too easy for them to leave a door open or fall asleep while on watch—or turn a weapon on their bosses—for most employers to be stupid enough to abuse them. These are some of the most sought-after jobs in the entire world.

They can also be the riskiest. The life expectancy of a soldier in a poorly run security team can be measured in days if not hours. Some of the worst employers only use their teams to slow down attackers, expecting they can always hire new protection in the next world they visit.

Most of those people come to a bad end. Both the protectors and their clients.

Justicar Nataal and her deputies can't do much about that, much as she might prefer. Instead of worrying about crimes that have already happened, they focus on prevention, usually by providing a well-armed presence in locales where you might find several security teams otherwise clashing. That usually means they're overseeing the action in the Hub, but they also take charge of the protection of Finnian and his team too.

Anyone else worth protecting already has their own team. The rest of us, we're just careful to not have too much worth taking away. Once we do, then we move out to the Beach and staff up our own security teams.

The grand exception to that is the Vigilance Committee that oversees the Shacks. The makeup of this crew shifts more often than the sands of the Beach, as most of the people who live there are the kind who couldn't open a Door with an atomic crowbar. They don't have the money to hire a security team, so they make up one of their own out of whichever well-armed volunteers might be available on any given night.

Back when I was younger, I took my turns with the Vigilance Committee in the Shacks. It's a dangerous, thankless job, and the best you can hope for is to emerge in the morning with a belly full of free food donated by grateful souls—and a skin without bruises or holes donated by the less kindly sort.

All that said, there's not much that's strictly speaking against the law around here. The Vigilance Committee and the security teams and even the

justicar's office are there for protection alone. They don't worry about things like gambling or drugs or even a well-run scam. When it comes to things like that—especially the so-called victimless crimes—you're pretty much on your own.

That's one of the reason Nexopolis is so popular among the Door-opening crowd. Back home in their own worlds, the ones they rule over, they have to keep up appearances. They can't be seen indulging in the various vices they adore that help them blow off steam from the pressures they feel from wielding all their power. They have a public image to uphold.

Not so much here. To them, Nexopolis is the city of sin. The den of delights limited only by their lack of imagination.

But then, at their heart, they're tourists of the worst sort. The kind that come into town, whoop it up loud, trash the joint, and then leave the mess for the locals to clean up after.

Don't be one those jackasses. Please.

## The Neighborhoods

Despite not being all that big, Nexopolis still has a number of recognizable neighborhoods. The borders of them sometimes morph over the years, changing with the ebb and flow of the people who call this world their home, but they each have their own distinct natures.

I can sum them up for you, but nothing beats the actual experience of strolling through each of these places on your own heels and toes. It's the only way you can feel the pulse of a place in a way that words just can't reproduce. It's the difference between me telling you about the scents of Wan Li's soup shop and sticking your head in through the door to breathe it in yourself.

So, I'm going to tell you about these places—give you some warnings, even—but don't let any of that stop you from heading out to poke around these places on your own. As you probably already know if you've opened enough Doors in your life, there's no substitute for being there.

## The Free-Trade Zone

The most important part of the entire city is the Free-Trade Zone. It's an oxymoron, of course. While there may be lots of trade going on there, damn little of it is free of cost.

Well, it's free in the sense that Finnian doesn't do a whole lot to regulate any of it, other than taxing it. You can buy or sell just about anything you want in the Free-Trade Zone, up to and including drugs and even properly procured organs. About the only thing that we don't permit is the actual trading of living people of any kind.

If it's a sentient being, it's off limits, whether it looks human or not.

It's not like people don't get bought and sold all over the known worlds, but it's a distasteful business. Finnian has declared over and over that he doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

"It brings in the wrong kind of clientele," he says. "You want that sort of thing, then we don't need your business."

For just about anything else, though, you can find a market in the Free-Trade Zone. Like a lot of the city, it's set up in two parts. There's the public face featured in a storefront that faces out onto Main Street or one of the other roads that run through the north side of town. And then there's the underground part of it that fronts onto a wide hallway that runs under the street.

Most of the stores have a Door of their own set into them. The proprietors there can use their Keys to open them as an emergency escape hatch if nothing else, right? These often lead to spots on the Grand Stair that sit closest to their best suppliers or customers, giving them easy access to the worlds most important to their business.

The merchants are supposed to report any and all business that transpires through these Doors. Finnian also has a staff of Customs Officers who go around and inspect these places. It's their job to collect the tariffs on all transactions as well.

The center of the Free-Trade Zone, though, isn't Main Street. Sure, that's where all the tourist brochures point you, but what do you expect? The Nexopolis Merchants Association pays for those. That's because they want to sell you their dirt-cheap goods at a high retail markup.

You can also find stands like that jammed together in the Agora. All the real business, though—the high-volume trading between worlds that we're so good at facilitating—takes place in the Hub.

The Hub is a large warehouse located underneath Concentric Park. That's the one in the center of the city that features a set of raised circles that stab toward the sky like a stepped pyramid without any right angles. Unless you're into calculus, in which case, it's all right angles measured from the center of the Hub but broken down into a polygon with an infinite number of sides.



At least that's how Marsheeba explains it to me, but she's Finnian's chief engineer. Us regular folks call that kind of shape a circle.

Marsheeba designed the Hub, but thankfully she let other people handle Concentric Park. It's the most beautiful garden I've ever seen. It features sports fields on the outside, with seating for observers on the edge of the next highest tier, which also features all sorts of food stands to serve those supporters. Above that sits my favorite part of the entire park, the Garden Circle.

Imagine a garden filled with beautiful flowers and plants gathered from all around the known worlds. The part that always chokes me up, though, is the section that shows off native plants rescued from the ashes of the war that devoured the rest of the planet.

It's not all that somber though. One huge favorite is the hedge maze that our groundskeepers sculpted to resemble the Labyrinth portion of the Grand Stair. I hear some people come here to study it before they go hunting for the real version—not that it does them much good. The Labyrinth tests a lot more than your sense of direction.

Jump up from there, and you find the Nexopolis Zoo. If you thought the garden was amazing, the zoo will blow you away. It features all sorts of creatures, some of which cannot be found anywhere else on this world or any other. The butterfly display is my favorite. Some of those creatures shimmer with colors I didn't know existed until I saw them land on the back of my hand.

The crown of Concentric Park, of course, is the sparkling jewel set in the center of the top level: the Peak Fountain. It is the only work of kinetic art I know of that's powered by Doors. It's actually a waterfall more than a fountain. There's a Door at the bottom that allows the collected water to flow through it. From there, it flows through a hidden section of the Grand Stair, plunging from the ceiling to the floor, where it enters another Door. And then it returns to the top of the fountain through an inverted Door, using the built-up momentum to shoot the water high into the air, where it starts all over again.

Except that's all bollocks.

Doors don't work that way. They don't stay open forever. They don't let water pass through them. And they especially don't let you play with gravity and momentum like that.

Right?

Still, it looks amazing, and if any self-appointed tour guide tries to sell you on that whole Fountain of Doors, you've just learned something important

about him. He's either an idiot, or he's lying through his teeth. Either way, don't trust him.

If you ever wonder what's under Concentric Park, though, or why Finnian would have bothered with building such a large public space in the middle of an island on which there's precious little room, it's because the Hub sits beneath it. The Hub is too important of an installation to leave exposed to the environment, especially during hurricane season, and Finnian didn't want anyone to have a private place located on top of it.

"Too many ways for things to go wrong with that," he told me. "Even if there's nothing going on, the appearance that something could is enough to cause us troubles. Better to keep the place as clear as we can instead."

The outside wall of the Hub consists of Doors big enough to drive a truck through. There are sixteen of these, each of which can open up into a different part of the Grand Stair. When they're not in use as Doors, though, each of the Doors opens up into a warehouse filled top to bottom with salable goods stacked on metal racks.

The warehouses are fully staffed to be able to accept or send out deliveries around the clock. The time of days doesn't always matchup between worlds, as you know, so there's no use in trying to establish regular working hours, no matter what time it might be here.

"The sun never sets on the Grand Stair," as Finnian likes to say. Mostly because there's never any sun there at all.

Most people don't spend any time at all in the Hub. If you're not a merchant transporting massive amounts of goods between worlds, there's not much point to it. It's as pragmatic and uninspiring a place as you'll ever encounter, and there are easier Doors to use to get to any of the worlds they work with.

The Hub is the most expensive and extensive system of Doors ever constructed in such a concentrated area on any world, so I've been told. It's not easy to make Doors that large, much less find places that work for them inside the Grand Stair. It's even harder to put them in easy reach of the other set of Doors of a similar size that lead to other worlds. And we also offer—for a reasonable fee—caravan guards along those routes on the Grand Stair, to help ensure no one can hijack or rob our customers moving up and down them.

Many people also patronize the Ancient and Honorable Guild of Porters, a transworld organization that specializes in transporting goods and guiding people from one Door along the Grand Stair to another. They cover a far wider selection of worlds

than we do, and they also can provide guides and guards to those interested in wandering far from the better-beaten tracks. They have one of the larger offices in the Free-Trade Zone.

## The Beach

Not everyone who calls Nexopolis home works in the Hub, of course. Me, for instance, I work for the city's administration. Others make a good living providing services to merchants, tourists, and travelers, selling supplies, groceries, and drinks.

Some don't do a damn thing here. They make their money—or establish their power—someplace else. They just come here to relax.

Sure, most of them stay away during the rainy season, but that just makes it quiet enough around here for the real locals to recover for a few months before the nonstop party starts up again.

If you have pull—whether in the form of credits or influence—you live at the Beach. Technically, the beach is the strip of sand that lines the southern and eastern sides of the island, acting as a buffer between the ring road and the wide, blue sea. But as a neighborhood, it extends four or five blocks back from the road.

The Beach is mostly filled with homes, everything from humble bungalows to high-rise condominiums to luxurious villas. Just about every powerful person you've ever heard of traipsing along the Grand Stair has a place here, and several of them have more than one. They throw the most fabulous parties you've ever seen at their villas, and they engage in clandestine meetings in their secret apartments or in their subterranean hideouts.

The luxury here can be dazzling, especially if you've never strayed too far from your home world. Just remember that those diamonds that are so rare and valuable in your world are used for landfill in other places. The secret of being a prosperous merchant is to buy low and sell high, and no one beats Nexopolis at that.

That's one reason the city has lasted so long. There are just too many powerful people who profit off it for any of them to want to risk disrupting or destroying it. When a good chunk of your power is based on being able to get the things you need at a cut-rate price, you'd be a fool to risk cutting that off. While you can say a lot of vile things about some of the Gossamer Lords and other powerful entities that float through this place, few of them are fools.

People in positions of power don't last long if they're too dumb. Even if they can manage to float along on their powers when they're back home in



*Parties at the Beach allow for less...savory business to be done.*

some backwater where they're the only person who can spot a Door much less open it, around here, the sharks separate the minnows out fast.

Nexopolis, in short, is the big leagues, and you'd better bring your A game here, no matter what you're playing. The people who live in the Beach constantly jockey for the best position, and their tools can range from social disgrace and financial ruin all the way up to and including thievery and murder.

Honestly, I don't go there myself on a social visit unless I'm invited and bring along a pal I can trust. They play high-stakes games there, and I can't afford to lose.

Sometimes I get sent there as part of my official duties. When that happens, I have the full support of the administration behind me, and I can handle myself with confidence.

I'll admit, that's when I enjoy it most.

While most people in the Beach are guests, the long-term residents there have their own ways to keep themselves secure. Some of them have underground suites of rooms that are only accessible from the Grand Stair—or by drilling down to them through dozens of feet of rock. Others keep them-



selves and their loved ones secure with private security forces armed to the teeth.

It's rare that we have any problems out there. The residents are too well prepared for any kinds of surprises. That doesn't stop people from starting fights or attempting robberies every now and then. They're just usually squashed before anyone else can respond to them. You'd be surprised how easy it is to hide evidence of wrongdoing when you can toss it away in another world.

Or maybe you wouldn't.

## The Shacks

The Shacks lie in that oblong ring between the Beach to the south and east, the Capitol to the north, the Rocks to the west, and the Free-Trade Zone in the middle. Some call it the donut. Others just ignore its shape and call it a hole.

This is by far the largest section of the city. For many people, it's the only part of the island they see for the bulk of their lives.

I was born there. I grew up there. Most of my friends and family still live there.

I hate it too.

That's why I worked hard to find the first job with the administration that I could find. And then I worked even harder to climb my way up the ladder there, proving myself worthy of Finnian's responsibility and—more importantly—trust.

That's why he asked me to write this guide. That's why I take the job seriously. And that's why I'll warn you to keep out of the Shacks.

If you wander around the known worlds, you'll run across utopias every now and then, I'm sure. Wonderful, glittering jewels of civilization that show the heights to which every society should aspire. They all have one thing in common.

They're built on the backs of less fortunate. In some rare and advanced societies, they may have managed to slough off the grunt work onto sophisticated robots, which then form the underclass necessary to keep the rest of the utopia polished to a gleaming finish. In just about every case, though, that underclass is formed of people who do all the grunt work they can't get machines to manage.

People are usually cheaper to hire than androids are to buy, and they keep making new ones to replace the old ones. It's cheaper to house and feed the living than it is to maintain and fuel machines. Plus, you don't have to worry about recycling them when you're done with them. They're entirely biodegradable.

In Nexopolis, those disposable workers forming that faceless crowd live in the Shacks. If you don't want to see them, don't worry about it. Their places sit behind every track beaten by the visitors who pass through our fine city. Unless you take the wrong turn—which isn't easy to do, as it involves turning off a boulevard into an alley—you'll never have to worry about them ruining your view. But if you willfully wind your way off that well-worn path, you can find the Shacks so fast it's almost like they're waiting there for you.

They're called the Shacks because that's how they started out, as a set of sloppy buildings slapped together on any out-of-the-way lump of land on the island. They got washed away just about every rainy season, but the people just hunkered down in their own emergency shelters as best they could and then set about to rebuilding them again as soon as the sun came out.

Lots of the people who live in the Shacks these days don't come from around here. Their lords brought them here from other lands to work at whatever projects needed doing. And they came willingly and were thrilled to do it.

For most of those folks, moving from whatever backwater world they called home to here was a huge step up. Even the worst hovels in the Shacks looks like a palace when compared to living as a peasant in a medieval land. We have electricity and indoor plumbing and constant entertainment piped into our quarters. And they can send money back home to the people they left behind.

So it's not all bad. In fact, most of those people who were left behind often dream of finding their way into a position like that themselves.

Does that make it right? Does it make it wrong?

I don't know. But I do wonder sometimes what's fair about a multiverse that randomly picks winners and losers like that. And then I laugh at myself for believing that this world—or any other, for that matter—is fair.

Is it fair that some people can open Doors and explore other worlds while the rest of us are stuck where we were born? Does it seem right that the rest of us can't aspire to such powers? That they cannot be earned, only granted?

Most times I don't worry about things like that. There's only so much any of us can do to change our lot in life. I wouldn't say that fate determines our destinies, but it sure seems to at least get us started in one direction. And once you gather some momentum on your path—wherever it might lead you—it gets damn hard to turn around.

Anyhow, you probably won't end up spending too much time in the Shacks. If you do, keep an eye out for the Vigilance Committee. You can spot them by the bright blue shirts they wear when they're on patrol. The fabric even glows in the dark.

The Vigilantes—as patrolling members of the Vigilance Committee are known—like to say they wear that color so people know who they can turn to when they have trouble. There's some fear among the uninitiated that the shirts might make it easy for malcontents to pick the Vigilantes out of a crowd and target them for attacks.

The truth of it is that the Vigilantes are usually the best-armed people on the streets of the Shacks, barring only the justicar and her deputies. And they can sometimes be a little trigger happy. They don't wear those shirts so that people don't shoot at them. They wear them so they don't accidentally fire at each other.

I'd call the Vigilance Committee corrupt if it had ever meant to be something honorable in the first place. The people in the Shacks started it up for their own protection, and it became a protection racket in nothing flat. Most folks don't complain about that part of it though because it gets the job done. They only gripe when they don't get what they're paying for.

The trouble with an inherently corrupt protection force like this is that the Vigilantes rarely mind looking the other way, as long as someone can make it worth their while. That's why the western part of the Shacks—the one nearest the Rocks—is the worst section of the entire island. Want to trade in drugs, gambling, or even sex? You can find someone there willing to sell it to you—for the right price.

Most of the people who call the Shacks home are just there trying to scratch out an honest living, though, and only want to be left alone to try to accomplish that. The buildings there have gotten better over the years—in terms of construction, at least. But that just means that they're better suited to packing more and more people into them.

The population density is higher in the Shacks than anywhere else. The place is full of tall buildings made of bare concrete and steel, brutal structures designed to warehouse workers. That's one reason lots of people call the neighborhood the Stacks instead.

Most of the people who live here work twelve-hour days, six days a week. Then they get one day off to do their laundry, shopping, drinking, relaxing, sending money home, or whatever. It's not a lot of time, but it's enough.

I don't know what kind of calendar you're on, but be sure to figure out which day that is before you think about heading into the Shacks. Most of the time, the streets of the Shacks stand empty because the people who live there are too busy to do more than rush back and forth from work. On that one day off, though, every square inch of the roads are packed with people looking to blow off a little steam.

I'll give the Shacks one thing though. They have some of the best food on the island, and in my experience, maybe on any world. That's because the workers there hail from so many different places, and they bring their cuisine along with them. Then, because they're all forced to live so close together, it's inevitable that some of them get blended together.

Many of those experiments get tossed aside, and rightly so. But every now and then, those cooks find something that works, that stands above any of the original flavors—a meal that's far greater than its ingredients.

I live in the Capitol these days, but I still go down to the Shacks to eat. Nothing beats it, and it's all dirt cheap too.

If you dare to head down that way, look for one of the dozen or so plazas around the place. These are packed with stalls jammed into rows that line the walls. Each of these is only about ten feet wide and goes back maybe twenty feet at best, and the people who work there all look like they might sleep behind the counter when they roll down their doors at night.

But the food is fantastic.

If you're new to this world, be careful you don't try something too outlandish at first. It's all too easy to wind up with a wicked case of food poisoning when you're wandering into a fresh cuisine for the first time. But if you got here from someplace else, then I probably don't need to warn you about that, right?

You might find a Door or two in the Shacks if you know where to look. Most people who have that information, though, aren't the sharing kind.

## The Capitol

The Capitol district lies on the north side of the island. The shore there is rough and rocky, and prevailing winds cause waves to pound against it almost constantly. If the Beach is where you to go relax on a peaceful day, this is where you come to rage against the worlds and get stuff done.

The buildings here are all skyscrapers that have been raised three stories off the ground to get them out of the way of the occasional tidal waves that splash up over the rocks and flood everything near-



by. That makes the streets around there uninhabitable on a regular basis. You can often find temporary stalls set up here and there, but they can all be easily packed up and hauled away on less than an hour's notice.

Or they're so flimsy and worthless the owners don't care if the places get washed away. It's cheaper and easier to just replace them the next day. Or wait until the rainy season is over, at least.

The Capitol Building—for which the district is named—is the tallest building in the entire world, a pyramidal skyscraper that towers over the rest of the island. Some of the merchants have wanted to build higher, but they're regularly denied permission. Few of them could afford the magical reinforcements integrated into the Capitol Building anyhow—much less purchase the necessary land on which to build such a beast—and those that have tried to go without them have watched inclement weather blow their efforts into the sea.

Most of the Capitol Building consists of offices for the people who help Finnian run the government here. Generally, these are lifelong bureaucrats concerned with figuring out how much they can gather from the merchants in tariffs before those merchants decide they'd be better off not bothering with Nexopolis.

Some of them are a bit more useful than that. There's the entire Office of Business Development, for instance, which devotes itself to finding new worlds it can open Doors to. The people there have mounted a dedicated exploration of the Grand Stair that extends far beyond Nexopolis. They've already mapped countless Doors and cataloged the thousands of worlds they lead to.

They then use that precious knowledge to open up trade partnerships with the rulers who've established their domains on those worlds, and they welcome them into the larger life beyond the Grand Stair. You'd be surprised how many such rulers only know a few hundred yards of the Grand Stair, if they know about it at all, limiting themselves to accessing places they can reach with a five-minute walk.

Our employees from the Office of Business Development—often known as the OBD—always work in teams and try to ensure they always have some kind of edge in the places to which they're going. The vast majority of them are unarmed combat experts, and several of them are top experts in their chosen fields of knowledge and research. These are the best people we have, doing our most important work.

It's one thing to throw your world open to interdimensional trade. Lots of places have tried that, but few of them have managed the success to rival Nex-

opolis, especially over the course of so many centuries. The Agora stands as a strong counterexample, but it's located on the Grand Stair rather than in a Gossamer world. While that gives it some huge advantages for trade, like the fact that it's easier to reach directly from any other world, it also comes with problems of its own.

It's a challenge to declare ownership over a section of the Grand Stair and secure it, for instance. That doesn't much bother the freewheeling merchants of the Agora, many of whom are Dendaros, a people who spend most of their days psychically disguised so as not to scare off their customers. They're naturally more fluid about things like property and community—even identity—but in Nexopolis we pride ourselves on our security and stability.

Many of the merchants here point to Finnian's long-term leadership as the reason behind our continuing success. He turns around and attributes it to his decision to fully fund and support the Office of Business Development. What Finnian doesn't like to advertise is that the Office of Business Development isn't only about exploring new worlds and seeking out new civilizations. Once it's managed all that and opened up the Doors for trade, it continues to monitor those same civilizations. In effect, it's become an excellent interworld espionage organization.

As Finnian often explains, we don't spy on other worlds with bad intentions. We keep eyes on them to make sure they don't have any dangerous intentions of their own. More than one petty dictator with delusions of grandeur has been dazzled by Nexopolis in the past, and we regularly have to deal with the threat of invasion. The Office of Business Development allows us to learn about plans for such incursions early and deal with them before they're launched. A little early discouragement goes a long way toward keeping such leaders in their places.

To that same end, Nexopolis has a long-standing policy against transporting soldiers and weapons of mass destruction through the Hub. We're savvy enough to realize that such things happen whether we're involved or not, but we refuse to make them easier to manage. As Finnian likes to say, "War is bad for business. Just look at all the customers it kills."

That's not to say that we haven't had many different leaders in Nexopolis over the years. Some of them have tried to change that policy, but Finnian managed to stop them every time. All it usually takes is pointing out that allowing armies to march through the Hub makes it easier for an army to march on Nexopolis and overthrow whoever's in



*“This is so NOT what I signed up for when I agreed to Finnian’s request!”*

charge. That stops most objections to the current policy cold.

## The Rocks

The last neighborhood of Nexopolis has the least going on in it. Situated as it is on the west side of the island, the Rocks suffers from the same kind of devastating tidal waves that plague the Capitol district, but it gets them even worse.

That side of the island was still filthy with radiation and other toxins when Finnian founded Nexopolis—the prevailing winds and tides dropped them there—and it hasn’t gotten a lot better over the years since. The land itself is fairly clean now, but the trouble comes from the debris that regularly washes up there. The rest of the world is still poisoned beyond repair, and bits and pieces of that wind up strewn about the Rocks, even to this day.

Nobody with any self-respect or a pair of credits to rub together would ever live in the Rocks, but it seems we have more than a few people who lack those basics on this island. Most of them are former residents of the Shacks who couldn’t handle the

high-pressure life there, but some of them hail from the Beach or the Capitol instead.

A largish number of them are travelers from other worlds who decided to hole up there rather than risk walking through another Door ever again. It may be tough on the Rocks, but for some people it’s far worse back home.

To look at the place during the day, you wouldn’t know anyone’s out there at all. The residents keep out of sight during the day, often because direct sunlight causes them pain. Ever stood out in the open on a beach after getting a horrible sunburn the day before? Imagine feeling like that every day of your life due to low-grade radiation exposure.

At night, though, the people emerge from the Rocks like worms from the soil. It’s safe for them to move around then, and the darkness covers up some of their worst mutations or lesions.

Oh, I’m kidding. Most of them are just normal people like you or me. Or they would be if they could figure out how to get clean.

The Rocks used to be where the flotsam and jetsam of our society wound up squatting on top of or even under the real thing. If you wanted something illegal done and needed someone desperate enough



to give it a shot for you, this was the place to go. In lots of ways, it still is.

The life expectancy on the Rocks is the lowest in the city. If the filth that washes up on shore doesn't kill you, the last few mutated predators hardy enough to survive out there can finish you off in a heartbeat. Most of them have been hunted down to extinction—officially—but I still hear rumors of bloodthirsty beasts roaming out there in the darkness. Whether they're just legends or are serious trouble, I can't say. Maybe the bodies I've seen torn to pieces are the handiwork of the most desperate people on the island instead, but you wouldn't know it by the size of the bite marks they leave behind.

This is also where the drug addicts and alcoholics wind up once they've been kicked out of every decent part of the city. We've seen a ray of hope break through the darkness there in recent times, although it's hard to say if it's a break in the clouds or the first flash of a conflagration. A woman who calls herself Mother Girl showed up there last year and started preaching, and the Rockers—as the folks there call themselves—took to her like fresh moonshine from an untainted still.

Ironically, Mother Girl looks like she must be fifteen years old. She claims she had an epiphany about the Doors on her deathbed and began her journey along the Grand Stair soon after. For someone who claims she was knocking on Death's door not so long ago, she's seems awfully young.

The Office of Business Development has sent people in after her countless times, just to ask her a few questions and assess what kind of threat she might pose, but she refuses to speak with them. As soon as they show up, she bolts off into the Rocks and loses them. I don't blame those officers for not wanting to follow her too far, but it's stunning that she's held out this long.

Mother Girl works primarily out of the Mess, a labyrinthine conglomeration of temporary shanties held together with chewing gum, baling wire, and memories. The place gets knocked down every rainy season, but the Rockers just scoop up what they can and build new places on top of the wreckage.

Word is the debris has built up over the years to become something like its own cave complex. If you know the right ways to get in and you don't get lost finding your way through the Mess in the first place, you can snake your way into these hidden places and hole up against even the worst storms. You might think there would be a Door or two that opens up into those hollow spots down there, but I can confirm there are no such entrances or exits in the Mess's firmament. If there was, we'd have found

it by now for sure, and if the Rockers discovered one down there, they'd destroy it anyhow. They like having a place no one else can reach—not even those of us who regularly walk between worlds.

In any case, Mother Girl's cult seems harmless so far. From what we can tell, she's preaching things like "love your neighbors" and "treat other people well." Stuff that's hard to argue with and which seems obvious to most of us. Of course, most of us don't wind up on the Rocks, so maybe that's how she's found such a receptive audience here.

The fact that she's got the attention of so many Rockers, though, worries Finnian a bit. We've heard that some people from the Shacks are even venturing into the Rocks to hear her sermons on their day off. If Mother Girl gets a foothold there too, it's not much of a leap for her to reach into any other part of the island, and Finnian doesn't much care for the idea of dealing with some kind of religious revolution among the masses.

The Rockers don't seem eager to cooperate with the Office of Business Development on finding her though. They're happy to talk about her and even rant a bit about the things she's been teaching them, but as soon as anyone asks where she might be, everyone winds their lips up tight.

Cult leaders don't frighten me so much, but anyone who can get a bunch of junkies to close ranks around her like that? That worries me.

## What Lies Outside

Nexopolis may be an island, but it's just one tiny part of an entire Gossamer world. I've already told you there's not much out there. But if you got here on your own, you're an explorer, and I know your type. That's how you found Nexopolis in the first place.

Even if you were led here, chances are good that your curiosity tugged you along just as hard as anything—or anyone—else who may have influenced you. If you were dragged here against your will, well, you should listen to this part too.

There's nothing out there worth looking at. The entire planet is hostile to life—human or otherwise.

Of course, that's not going to stop you from trying, so allow me to illuminate further.

When the Dwimmerlaik invaded this world, they had no intent of claiming it for their own. While the high-tech and high-magic properties of Nexopolis make it ideal as a trading post, it also made this

world a wonderful place for developing and testing new weapons. Before the war—and especially during it—that was this world’s primary export, and the Dwimmerlaik wanted to put an end to that.

They accomplished that. In spades.

The only thing that saved Nexopolis is the cold, hard fact that it’s damned hard to destroy an entire world. A planet is a large place, and it’s easy to overlook tiny islands barely poking out of the ocean, especially if you’re bombarding from orbit.

The first attacks that destroyed entire metropolises threw up huge clouds of smoke and ash. Some of that filth was radioactive, making it even harder for sensors to penetrate. All of that worked in the favor of the survivors like Finnian, many of whom escaped onto the Grand Stair. When the Dwimmerlaik went hunting for signs of life on the planet, they couldn’t find those survivors because they’d already left.

Not all of the people who escaped that attack, though, wanted to return. Can you blame them? Most of the planet was a glowing cinder by then, and life there only promised an early, painful death.

Finnian, though, had a vision. And he came up with a plan. And he was able to band enough people behind him to make it work.

That’s why he’s in charge.

Still, he’s only been able to reclaim this one small part of his home world. I’ve heard that he harbors ambitions to strike out and settle other portions as they become habitable, but I haven’t seen much movement along that front. He set up the Office of Homeland Recovery to pursue that plan, but the only word from them so far is, “The rest of the world is not ready for us yet.”

That doesn’t stop others from trying, of course. But don’t bother looking for any Doors to those outer reaches, because if they weren’t destroyed by the Dwimmerlaik, then Finnian destroyed or sealed the rest. If there are any out there (and I’m not saying there are), chances are good they don’t open anywhere pleasant. Now, there’s nothing stopping you from getting into a boat or a jet and taking off from here to explore the rest of the world.

Well, we don’t have many seaworthy boats around here, and jets and other aircraft are rare too. Most of our boats are made for skipping around the island’s shores, not crossing the open ocean. Some people take them out to go fishing, but the sea life around here still hasn’t fully recovered. Much of the seafood you find on your plate while you’re here may have been carried in via the Grand Stair. Some locals dine on the local stuff regularly, though, especially the folks who live on the Rocks, since they don’t have

many alternatives beyond our coconuts with their glow-in-the-dark rinds.

The truly curious can’t help themselves though. When anyone announces an intention to set off on an excursion to explore the rest of the planet, the Office of Homeland Recovery pays them a visit to discourage them.

That’s not as dark as it sounds. No one’s forbidden from making such an attempt, but we don’t like to see good people throwing their lives away. If it’s a particularly ambitious and well-funded attempt, Finnian himself has been known to drop by and chat with the venture’s leaders. Despite his position, he’s been unable to throw most of those people off their plans.

“They’ve already made up their mind long before I show up,” he tells me. “If words from anyone could have dissuaded them, they wouldn’t have gotten that far now, would they?”

That’s one of the other reasons I’m writing this book, actually. If I can help warn people away from such foolishness before they wander too far along that path, that means I’m saving lives, right?

Well, I can hope, can’t I?

If you do decide to head out from Nexopolis despite stringent and constant warnings, at least shoot for going south and east from here. Southeast, even.

You might notice that we get the worst weather from the north and west. That’s because the open ocean and the prevailing winds come from that direction. You can find land if you head off that way, but it’s bound to be a lot farther off.

The continent to the southeast was once home to the largest number of people on the entire planet. People used to vacation on its nearest shores. Now, at night, you can see the aura of them glowing over the horizon before you actually spot dry land.

If you’re immune to radiation and pollution and all sorts of poisons that would fry most people in their tracks, you might reach that continent and even be able to tour its cities. The vegetation there is all long dead, turned to ash along with all the animals—and people—who once lived there. But some of the buildings still stand. A few of them are intact, although all that’s left of most of them are blackened supports stretching like skeletal fingers toward the shrouded sky.

You couldn’t bring me there at gunpoint. I’d opt for the fast death of a speeding bullet instead.



# The People of Nexopolis

Sometimes, the most fascinating part of any world is the people who live in it. Nexopolis is no exception.

## Finnian

*“You know, I never wanted to be in charge of this place. Or any place really.” Finnian gazed out over the sparkling ocean from the balcony outside his office on the penultimate floor of the Capitol Building. “It just fell to me.”*

*I laughed at him but regretted it the moment I saw his face darken, like storm clouds brewing on the horizon, warning me of terrors to come. Then the thunderheads faded, and he favored me with a benevolent smile. “I know how silly that sounds. People don’t get to be where I am without having some ambition, and that’s a quality of which I suffer no shortage. But still it’s true.”*

*He gazed back out at the open sea, and I wondered what he saw there. He’d known this world before the war with the Dwimmerlaik destroyed it, and he’d guided it every step on its path back from the brink. When he stared down at those waters, did he see how far we’d come from then—or how much he had left to do?”*

— Willa’s notes

Finnian is a heavyset black man with graying dreadlocks he keeps bound behind him. He wears a modern business suit but with shorts and sandals instead of pants and shoes. His loose necktie is cut from the same material as a Hawaiian shirt. He smiles a lot, although it often seems to be hiding something.

He is likely the oldest living native of Nexopolis. After the war, those who could manage it scattered far and wide from the Gossamer world, never planning to return, so there could conceivably be others out there who have been around longer than him. As far as he’s concerned, though, they gave up the rights to those claims when they abandoned their world.

Finnian refused to leave his world to the Dwimmerlaik. He felt that as long as he held on to at least one little piece of it, that would mean they hadn’t won, that they hadn’t defeated his people complete-

ly. And given enough time, they could recover from the horrors inflicted upon them.

He’s made it his life’s work to see that happen, and so far he’s succeeded beyond anyone’s wildest dreams—even his own.

In his mind, the secret to Finnian’s success is his lack of ego about getting the job done. He has an ego, of course, and it’s plenty large, but he feels no need to stroke it when it comes to Nexopolis. He’s already established his legacy and ensured it will endure for as long as Nexopolis stands. He doesn’t need to take further credit for raising his beloved city even higher.

## Attributes

**PSYCHE** — 100 Points

**STRENGTH** — Paragon Rank

**ENDURANCE** — 40 Points

**WARFARE** — Paragon

## Powers

*Master of the Grand Stair* [35 Points] — With the help of the Office of Business Development, Finnian has accelerated his explorations of the Grand Stair. To him, though, the Grand Stair is a resource he can use, a means rather than an end. He studies it so he can better use it to improve Nexopolis and his authority over it.

*Eidolon Mastery* [50 Points] — Finnian remembers the world of Nexopolis the way it used to be. To him, that’s the natural order, and he strives to use his mastery of Eidolon to restore the world to its former glory. The island of Nexopolis is just the launch pad for the rest of his plan.

*Wrighting* [30 Points] — Finnian makes strong use of his Wrighting powers to communicate with his operatives in Nexopolis, on the Grand Stair, and (as he likes to say) abroad.

*Cantrips* [25 Points] — Charm, Chill, Clarity, Dampen, Draw, Flare, Focus, Heat, Grasp, Invigorate, Loosen, Mana, Mend, Nullify, Numb, Open, Purify, Reveal, Quicken, Smack, Spark, Stick, Stun, Sureness, Umbra Negation.

*Sorcery* [15 Points]

## Artifacts and Creatures

*Finnian's Last Credit* [14 Points] — Finnian has one remaining credit chip from the world Nexopolis used to be. He's drilled a hole through it, and he wears it around his neck on a chain as a constant reminder of everything he's lost—and how far he's come since then. More than that, it reminds him of who he is, and it keeps anyone from ever using that against him.

- True Name is Secret [4 Points]
- Confer True Name is Secret Power [10 Points]

*Finnian's Desk* [2 Points] — The desk in Finnian's office on the penultimate floor of the Capitol Building gives him access to a computerized communications system that features the icons of every member of the Nexopolis administration. From here, he can speak with everyone who works for him, no matter where they might be.

- Set of Icons [2 points]

## Domain

**NEXOPOLIS** [6 Points] — Finnian's Domain is Nexopolis, and he's spent most of his life rebuilding it after the war with the Dwimmerlaik. Much of this book is concerned with Nexopolis, and you can find the details about how it works as a Domain on page 40.

- Common Ground [2 Points]
- Control of Destiny [4 Points]

## Allies

*Partisan Support* [3 Points] — Finnian has the entirety of the Nexopolis administration behind him and offering him support. Most of his employees have a deep sense of loyalty to him that goes far beyond their paychecks.

*Mentor* [2 Points] — Lucien, the Lord of the Grand Stair, took an early interest in Finnian's work to restore Nexopolis, and he has silently been helping Finnian's people explore the limits of the Grand Stair. The relationship between the two is sometimes tense because Lucien hasn't shared all he knows about the Grand Stair, and Finnian wonders if the man has been secretly steering the Office of Business Development

*Lord of the Gossamer Worlds* [5 Points] — Vala and Finnian have grown to trust each other over the years—at least as much as any Gossamer Lords trust each other—and while Finnian takes great pains to



*Finnian, Master and CEO of Nexopolis*

appear politically neutral, he actually works behind the scenes to do what he can to keep her in power.

## Stuff

*Zero.*

## Finnian as an Ally

Finnian is a wonderful and helpful ally. He takes pride in bringing young Gossamer Lords under his wing and showing them how to get started exploring the Grand Stair. He often has jobs for adventurous lords interested in scouting out new places for him, and he's generous with providing both gear and payment.

The only caveat is that Finnian deals with so many people on a regular basis that he rarely has much time to spend with any single person. He can be hard to reach unless there's an emergency happening, but when real trouble happens, he always comes through. When the Dwimmerlaik destroyed his world he realized that he'd lost his battles with them mostly because few people were willing to bear the risk of saving him. He's worked hard since then to make himself and his domain indispensable to his fellow Gossamer Lords.



## Finnian as an Enemy

As a foe, Finnian is implacable and ruthless, although you'd never know it. He is far more aware of his enemies than he ever lets on, and he monitors them constantly. However, he prefers to keep them close to make it easier to keep track of them. He regularly invites the more powerful ones to parties at villas in the Beach, and he's been known to hire the ones that could use the work.

Often such employees think they're spying on Finnian, but he keeps much closer tabs on them. And he's not above having truly dangerous people eliminated when he's confident he can get away with it. To do so openly would run against his carefully crafted public persona, so he executes such plans—and such people—in secret.

## Objectives

Finnian's main objective is the revival of the entire world upon which Nexopolis sits, and he's made no secret of this ambition. He'd also like to help ensure that war never destroys a world the way it did his. He sees trade between the worlds as the best way to manage that. No one wants to go to war with people they rely on for business.

## Willa

*There's not much to tell about me. I grew up here in Nexopolis, and Finnian pulled me out of the Shacks and gave me a job. I owe him everything, and we both know and appreciate it.*

*Maybe that's why I don't mind devoting myself entirely to my job. It's brought me fortune, friends, and even a little bit of fame. Plus I get to help rebuild the world on which I was born. What else could I want?*

*A bit more luck? I've been blessed with plenty of that so far.*

— Willa's notes

Willa has Asian features and braided blond hair. She dresses conservatively (blouse and flowing skirt) as she wants people to take her seriously, but she can't resist adding splashes of color.

Willa is exactly what she seems: a young woman who's in way over her head. She's well aware of this though, and it doesn't seem to bother her at all. She's been lucky enough to land with a great group

of people who appear to have her best interests in heart, and that's more than she grew up with.

Born in the worst part of the Shacks—the bit that butts up next to the Rocks—Willa always thought she'd be headed for a job in the Free-Trade Zone if she was lucky, or wind up living on the Rocks like her dad if she wasn't. When Finnian approached her and informed her that she was something special, she didn't believe it at first, and she went along with the whole thing as if it was some kind of joke.

A year later, no one's gotten to the punch line yet, and she's finally started to relax into believing in both Finnian and herself. She still suffers a bit from impostor syndrome—the worry that someone's going to figure out that she's been faking it the entire time—but she knows now that she's sharper than anyone she ever met, at least before Finnian introduced himself to her. The world—worlds!—feel like they're wide open, ready and waiting for her to explore, and she can't wait to start in on exploring them in earnest.

Finnian's taking it slow with her though. He knows exactly how dangerous the Grand Stair and the vast variety of worlds that lie beyond its Doors can be, and he wants to make sure she's properly prepared before he lets her loose on them. To that end, he's set her up with a series of internships with a number of the most important people in the island. She suspects this is so she can spy on these people for him, and all of her subjects share her suspicions too, some even openly. Still, she's learned a phenomenal amount through these efforts, so that part of Finnian's plan seems to be working, and for that's she's grateful.

## Attributes

**PSYCHE** — Paragon Rank

**STRENGTH** — Paragon Rank

**ENDURANCE** — Paragon Rank

**WARFARE** — 10 Points

## Powers

*Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points] — Compared to Finnian, Willa may be a rookie when it comes to the Grand Stair, but she's seen already seen more of it than most Gossamer Lords her age. When she's not writing guides to Nexopolis, she works as an agent for the Office of Business Development, and the job has already taken her to more worlds than she can count.

*Cantrips* [5 Points] — Draw, Focus, Mend, Purify, Spark.

## Artifacts and Creatures

*Willa's Recorder* [14 Points] — Willa wears this as a silver circlet around her forehead, ostensibly to hold back her long hair. However, it actually records everything that happens around her at all times, even when she's sleeping, although she can turn it on and off at will.

Willa can replay the recordings back when she likes. For herself, the recordings play in her mind, just as if she's reliving them again. If she allows someone else to wear the device, it works the same for him, although she rarely permits this. Finnian is the only exception. Instead, she can project the recording holographically before her and allow people to witness the recordings that way.

The recorder is nearly indestructible, and it confers that power to its wearer as well. Finnian urged her to wear it at all times when he gave it to her, and she usually complies with that.

- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons. [4 Points]
- Confers Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons Power [5 Points]
- Contains an Icon of Finnian [1 Point]
- Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 points]

## Domain

Willa is young and has yet to establish a Domain of her own. In the future, Finnian hopes to help her carve out a different part of the world of Nexopolis for herself. Meanwhile, he's told her to be on the lookout for an appropriate world she might want to call her own instead.

## Allies

*Mentor* [2 Points] — Willa considers Finnian to be the closest thing she has to a father, especially since her real dad has floundered out of the Shacks and wound up living on the Rocks. Finnian sees a great deal of promise in her and has taken steps to help develop that—and her loyalty.

*Partisan Support* [3 Points] — Willa doesn't command the Nexopolis administration like Finnian does, but she can call on the organization for help whenever she needs it. The Office of Business Development doesn't leave its top operatives hanging out to dry.

## Stuff

*Good* [10 Points]



*What Willa knows, Finian will know soon after.*

## Willa as an Ally

Willa is a loyal and well-connected friend. She's a bit naïve when it comes to dealing with other Gossamer Lords, aside from Finnian. Most of them she's met are fellow citizens of Nexopolis or friendly outsiders she's been asked to introduce to the city.

Willa is a warm friend who can be fierce about protecting those she considers part of her circle. She doesn't care much about what other people think of her, and she's willing to bend, break, and stomp on the rules if it will help out a friend who needs her.

## Willa as an Enemy

Willa doesn't have any enemies, just people she doesn't think about anymore. Her experience with her father—and the people in the Shacks who gave her a hard time about her good fortune—is that it's not worth letting the people who don't like her much ruin her day. She treats most problems she has with people as temporary differences of opinion, and she's happy to mend fences with those who have worked against her in the past.

That said, she's far from stupid. When she spots someone working against her or trying to use her, she cuts them out of her life as fast and neat as trimming mold from cheese.

## Objectives

Willa's already achieved far more than she ever dreamed she would in life. When she was growing up, she only hoped to someday be able to leave the



Shacks. To live in the Capitol district and travel to other worlds seemed impossible. Now that she's managed it, her only ambition at the moment is to make sure she doesn't do anything that might cost her such a lofty position. Beyond that, she hopes to make Finnian proud of her every chance she gets.

## Marsheeba

*"As old as I am and as many things as I've seen, I still don't have time for this shit," Marsheeba said. "We have a world to rebuild here. I'm a doer, not a teacher!"*

*Finnian calmed her down with a gentle gesture. "All I'm saying, old friend, is that you could use some help with what you do. And if you don't train the people who can help you, how are you ever going to find that?"*

*Marsheeba just narrowed her eyes at him. She knew what he was up to. "You're just going to talk me into something whether I like it or not, aren't you?"*

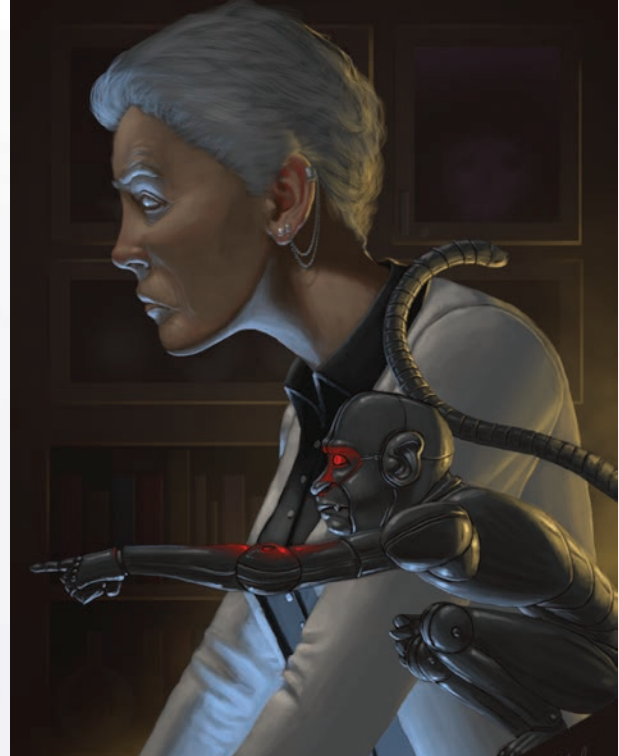
*"That's usually how it works, isn't it?" he said with his most winning grin. He waved me forward then. "So just cut to the chase and let me introduce you to your new intern."*

— Willa's notes

Marsheeba is an older white woman with freckles and graying, curly hair she keeps short. She wears a white lab coat over a t-shirt and loose capris. She frowns a lot, despite the fact she often has a mechanical monkey capering around her.

Marsheeba is one of the oldest people on Nexopolis, next to Finnian. While she hails from another world where she once established her own Domain, it was utterly destroyed during the war with the Dwimmerlaik. When the Dwimmerlaik turned their attention toward Nexopolis, she got there ahead of them and tried her best to warn Finnian and the rest of the disasters that were coming their way.

Or at least that's how she likes to tell it. In truth, she was fleeing from the Dwimmerlaik, and they pursued her here. She believes that she was the one who led them to this world, and while she's sworn to never reveal that information to anyone else, the guilt of it still weighs heavy on her. To atone for that horrible mistake, she has dedicated herself to doing everything she can to restore this world to its former glory, starting with Nexopolis.



*Marsheeba gazes into a screen as she checks the Hub's status.*

While it may have been Finnian who came up with the plan to turn Nexopolis into a hub of trade along the Grand Stair, Marsheeba's the one who actually implements it. She designed the Hub itself, and Finnian often remarks that he'd be lost without her. She just hopes he'd still feel that way if he knew the whole truth.

Marsheeba can come across as tough and uncaring, but really she's just too focused on her work. When you have to coordinate the network that holds together dozens of Gossamer worlds along the Grand Stair, things like social niceties don't tend to seem quite as important. She has a home in the Beach, but she rarely uses it, preferring to stay in her personal quarters in the Capitol Building instead.

### Attributes

**PSYCHE** — 100 Points

**STRENGTH** — Paragon Rank

**ENDURANCE** — 30 Points

**WARFARE** — Paragon Rank

### Powers

*Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points] — Marsheeba spent a good while on the Grand Stair, flee-

ing from the Dwimmerlaik. She goes back there to work on the Doors she helps build, but she rarely travels to other worlds these days. She prefers Nexopolis to all alternatives.

*Eidolon Mastery* [50 Points] — Marsheeba uses her affinity to Eidolon to guide her in not just making things right but making them even better.

*Wrighting* [30 Points] — Marsheeba engineered the inter-world communications network that Finnian enjoys using so much. Without it, the Office of Business Development would find it far more difficult to have explored so much of the Grand Stair so quickly.

## Artifacts and Creatures

*Marsheeba's Lab Coat* [19 Points] — Marsheeba wears a white lab coat that offers her a great deal more than any normal clothing could manage.

- Invulnerable to Normal Damage [4 Points]
- Confers Invulnerable to Normal Damage Power [5 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Confers Psychic Barrier Power [5 Points]
- Alternate Form [1 Point] — Can become a fashionable shawl/poncho for non-work affairs.

*Marsheeba's Robo-Monkey* [13 Points] — Marsheeba has a magically animated robotic monkey that she treats like a wizard's familiar. She constantly bounces ideas off it and uses it to help her perform tasks for which she does not have enough hands. It responds to her with sarcastic quips and mocks her for not thinking big enough, inspiring her to keep pushing harder.

- Animal Vitality [1 Point]
- Mobility [1 Point]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Able to Speak in Tongues and Voices [4 Points]
- Pass Through Door [1 Point]
- Contains Named and Numbered Cantrips [2 Points] — Chill, Flare, Grasp, Heat, Mend, Nullify, Purify, Reveal, Smack, Stun, Umbra Negation.

## Domain

**SHEBAKA** [1 Points] — Marsheeba's Domain was destroyed by the Dwimmerlaik, and she has yet to return to it. However, she keeps the option open in the back of her mind, just in case everything goes wrong in Nexopolis. So many years have passed by

now that the place might have started to recover on its own, and with some focused attention from her, it might improve fast.

- Personal Domain [1 Point]

## Allies

*Partisan Support* [3 Points] — Next to Finnian, Marsheeba is the best-known person in the entire administration. When he's not around, she speaks with his voice. (Sometimes literally, through a voice morpher she invented.)

*Lord of the Gossamer Worlds* [5 Points] — More than just the administration, Marsheeba can count on Finnian to help her when she's in a bind, not just on her account but because his plans rely on the results of her efforts to have any chance of success.

## Stuff

*Bad* [3 Points]

## Marsheeba as an Ally

Marsheeba is an excellent friend, although she's guarded with everyone, even Finnian, with whom she's had an occasional fling over the years. He would have liked it to have evolved into a more permanent relationship, but she cannot bear to open herself up to anyone that much, not even him.

Despite her standoffishness, Marsheeba has a great deal of influence in Nexopolis due to her position in the administration and the amazing work she's done with creating the Hub. She views her alliances pragmatically. If it serves her — and especially if it serves Nexopolis too — she is willing to strike a deal. However, she never trusts anyone fully and always has a backup plan in place in case they fail her.

## Marsheeba as an Enemy

Marsheeba is an implacable foe who never forgives nor forgets. She's clear and open in her belief that the Dwimmerlaik are a cancer trying to infect the Grand Stair, and she stands ready to excise this disease with every resource she can muster. Any who seem allied with them are by definition her foes too.

If someone runs afoul of Marsheeba, she hounds them until they either leave Nexopolis far behind or die. If they happen to be allied with Finnian, she restricts herself to working against them in secret, ensuring that no word of her actions will ever come back to haunt her.



## Objectives

Marsheeba wants to see Nexopolis become so well established and protected that she can leave it and return to her own Domain. In truth, it's been at that point for years, but she keeps finding excuses to keep her in Nexopolis instead. Although she refuses to admit it to anyone—including herself, this is because she's afraid to return to Shebaka.

If someone were to bring her news from her old home, though, that might be enough to spur her to return to it. Unknown to her, Finnian has placed that world off limits to the Office of Business Development, hoping to keep her with him as long as possible. When it comes to her ambitions and fears, he knows her better than she knows herself.

## Horattio

*"You think it's easy working this beat? If Justicar Nataal would do her damn job, we wouldn't need a Vigilance Committee, but the woman is too busy swilling drinks down at the Beach to care a bit for what's happening in the Shacks." Horattio tells me all this while we stroll down the streets in the south side of the Shacks. You could toss a coconut at the villas on the Beach from where we are.*

*"But don't you get paid to run the Vigilantes?" I ask, reminding him that he's not the altruistic hero he prefers to paint himself to be.*

*He snorts. "We don't get one damn dime from Finnian or Vala or whichever hand puppet he has sitting in the top office these days."*

*"By the business owners, I mean?"*

*He shrugs. "They make voluntary donations to help defray our costs. That's not quite the same thing as being on the administration's payroll, is it?"*

*It's my turn to shrug at the insinuation that I've sold out. We both know that he's sold in.*

— Willa's notes

Horattio is an older man with a white goatee and a little bit of a pot belly. He wears a Vigilance Committee T-shirt wherever he goes. He has dead eyes, and he likes to tote his sawed-off shotgun over his shoulder for easy access—and to show anyone who glances at him what he's all about.

Horattio isn't originally from Nexopolis. He was a refugee from a world ravaged by nuclear holocaust, and his Aunt Shirassi—his only living relative—

brought him here. Despite their poverty when they arrived, or perhaps because of it, Horattio worked his way up through the only power structure accessible to him: the Vigilance Committee.

The locals didn't take to Horattio instantly, but his aunt told him to be patient. Soon enough, he'd have everything he wanted, or so she said.

At the time, she'd hoped that he would amass an army of supporters and lead them back to his home world to reclaim it, but he had absolutely no interest in doing that. It seemed far too much like hard and thankless work to him, and he decided to put his focus here in Nexopolis instead. It wasn't long until he'd proven himself so valuable that he became one of the Vigilance Committee's top deputies.

Once inside, Horattio witnessed the tremendous corruption of the Vigilance Committee. Rather than being repulsed, he embraced it. When he spotted his chance, he framed the head of the Vigilance Committee—a rough-cut older man named Vikko—for stealing from the coffers of the Vigilantes' widows and orphans fund. In fact, Horattio had committed the crime himself, which is how he made sure all evidence pointed toward Vikko. To seal that particular deal, he even led the angry mob that threw Vikko into the ocean from the Rocks.

Ever since, Horattio has led the Vigilance Committee. He comes off as a laconic enforcer of common decency, but in fact he's a vicious bastard determined to keep hold of this petty kingdom he's stolen for himself. Those who cross him can expect to share Vikko's fate—or worse.

## Attributes

**PSYCHE** — Average Rank

**STRENGTH** — Superior Rank

**ENDURANCE** — Superior Rank

**WARFARE** — Superior Rank

## Powers

*Cantrips* [5 points] — Invigorate, Numb, Pain, Paralyze, Stun.

## Artifacts and Creatures

*Horattio's Gun* [13 Points] — Horattio carries a special sawed-off shotgun that gives him the edge he needs on the mean streets of the Shacks. He carries it with him wherever he goes, usually stuffed into a holster hanging under his left arm.

- Double Damage [2 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Confer Danger Sensitivity Quality [5 Points]

- Tireless Stamina [4 Points] — This gun never runs out of ammunition.

## Ally

*Partisan Support* [3 Points] — Horattio can call on the Vigilance Committee for help at all times. He can also usually depend on support from other locals in the Shacks who depend on the Vigilance Committee for protection—or at least stability.

## Stuff

*Good* [2 Points]

## Horattio as an Ally

Horattio is far from the most powerful person around. However, he's worked hard to parley what abilities he has into becoming the leader of the Vigilance Committee, and he likes to throw that weight around every chance he gets. Part of that is making friends with people he thinks are going places, especially if they're not already allied with Finnian and the administration.

Horattio is a glib and charming fellow when he meets people of power, although he's not always so kind with those he thinks of as beneath him. Those he likes can expect to be able to count on him, especially if there's a good scrap involved—and even more so if he can use it to thumb his nose at Finnian.

## Horattio as an Enemy

Horattio can be one mean bastard. If you cross him—if you even make him feel like you think he's beneath you—you have an enemy for life. He's savvy enough, however, to make sure that he doesn't take on someone clearly superior to him in open combat.

If he thinks he can take on someone, he does so in public and goes out of his way to crush and embarrass his foe. Otherwise, he figures out a way to trump up charges against his enemy and bring the entirety of the Vigilance Committee to bear against her. If that's not going to work, he crafts a scheme for that foe to wind up with a knife in her kidney and to be fed to the surging sharks that like to feed near the Rocks.

## Objectives

Horattio wants nothing less than to make Nexopolis his own. He hopes to one day lead a rebellion

against Finnian and take over the city. Only his closest friends even have a hint of this though.

Although Horattio isn't aware of it, Finnian knows all about his plans for a coup. Finnian didn't rebuild Nexopolis to have someone take it away from him. However, he finds it convenient to know all about his lead troublemaker, so he's restrained himself from making any move against Horattio—until the man gives him no choice.

Horattio knows he's a long way from ready to manage that yet, but he's a patient man. He plans to build toward that moment and take advantage of whatever opportunities might crop up for him in the meantime. If that includes making himself popular and wealthy as the head of the Vigilance Committee, he's willing to shoulder that burden.

## Trik

*“Don't touch that,” Trik says as he walks in to find me inspecting one of the many trophies lining the built-in shelves in his office, which occupies a good chunk of the 10th floor of the Capitol Building. “It's dangerous.”*

*“How so?”*

*He gives me an amused grunt as he strolls over to the window behind his desk, which looks out over the rest of the island stretching to the south. “It once possessed an entire continent worth of people, transforming them into a human hive mind.”*

*I take three careful steps back. “Then why do you have it sitting out here in the open?”*

*He shrugs. “We keep the truly terrifying stuff locked up.”*

— Willa's notes

Trik is a thin man with Arabic features. His special glasses glow with arcane symbols. He wears a black V-neck T-shirt, cargo pants, and combat boots.

Many people believe Trik is the smartest person in all of Nexopolis. He thinks that if that's true, it's only because he manages to surround himself with people who are even smarter than him, at least within their chosen disciplines. And he enjoys the contradictions in that.

Trik loves Nexopolis. He grew up on the Beach, spending most of his days surfing and living a privileged life. It wasn't until he became involved with the OBD that he gave that up to protect his friends and family—his city—with every bit of power available to him.



Trik and his fiancée were boating off the coast of Nexopolis when a gigantic creature from another world attacked the island. They tried to escape, but the tentacled beast destroyed their boat. If it hadn't been for the fast intervention of the Office of Business Development—which had been tracking the creature's movements—the entire island might have been destroyed. As it was, Trik's fiancée was lost at sea, and if not for his own sorcerous abilities, he might have shared her fate.

After he recovered, Trik signed on with the Office of Business Development, and he's worked there ever since. He never wanted the top job in the department, preferring to put in several years of driven service to become the most decorated field agent instead. The survivor's guilt over his fiancée's death spurred him to do the most good for the most people as often as he could, and he's singlehandedly saved Nexopolis from disaster more than once.

When the previous director went missing, Finnian called on Trik to step up to the position, and he reluctantly accepted. To his eternal credit, Trik has done a better job with it than any of his predecessors, most of whom had been lifelong bureaucrats who'd worked in the Hub for much of their careers. His keen sense of what kinds of dangers threaten Nexopolis and how to deal with them, along with his years of experience working along the Grand Stair and earning the respect of his fellow agents has made him a legend in his own time.

While Finnian strives to build Nexopolis into the major trade center along the Grand Stair, Trik and his team work to keep their little island as safe as they can from all the trouble they stir up. He's been known to step out from behind the desk when necessary, something no other director ever dared to try, and despite the inherent risks, it's paid off every time. It's not an easy job, but that's what makes it worth doing—or so he likes to tell his agents.

## Attributes

**PSYCHE** — 10 points

**STRENGTH** — Average Rank

**ENDURANCE** — Superior Rank

**WARFARE** — Paragon Rank

## Powers

*Sorcery* [15 points]



*Trik is the “hands-on” director of the OBD.*

## Artifacts and Creatures

*Trik's Glasses* [43 Points] — Trik is rarely if ever seen without his pair of enhanced spectacles, which allow him to always see things as they truly are. They also protect him from outside influences, about which he is always vigilant.

- Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Confers Psychic Barrier Quality [5 Points]
- Search Through Worlds [4 points]
- Confers Search Through Worlds Power [10 points]
- True Name is Secret [4 Points]
- Confers True Name is Secret Power [10 Points]
- Hanging Named and Numbered Spells [2 points]

## Allies

*Partisan Support* [3 Points] — While the whole of the Nexopolis administration may not always trust him, Trik has the Office of Business Development in his pocket. His officers follow his orders to the letter and do their utmost to anticipate his future requests.

*Lord of the Gossamer Worlds* [5 Points] — Finnian's not always sure he likes Trik either. He has a

healthy distrust of the man's uncanny ability to cut deals with people. However, he values Trik above all of his other employees, including even Marsheeba. While Nexopolis relies on her past work, Trik's efforts concern the city's future.

## Stuff

Good [5 Points]

### Trik as an Ally

Trik is one of the best friends anyone could ever have. While he's friendly on the surface though, it's rare for him to truly warm up to someone. Those who get past the back-clapping stage of niceties with him, though, will find that he's a fantastic person to have on their side.

However, Trik is all about business. If he does you a favor, he's going to expect that you do something for him to repay his kindness. Similarly, though, he always pays his debts, and having him owe you a favor can go a long way.

### Trik as an Enemy

Trik doesn't have enemies, just people who haven't come around to his way of thinking yet. He doesn't care about seeing the good in others so much as their potential usefulness, and everyone has some way to become useful to him. They just have to figure it out.

When it comes to people who represent clear and unremitting threats to him or his department, though, Trik doesn't hesitate to apply direct and lethal solutions. While everyone may have the potential to become a customer, sometimes the investment into that relationship will never pay out.

### Objectives

Trik wants to make Nexopolis the center of commerce for all the connected Gossamer worlds. As part of that, he hopes to explore as much of the Grand Stair as he possibly can. While he's ostensibly a business shark in a thousand-credit suit, he sees himself as an explorer, leveraging Nexopolis's economic power and interests into discovering new worlds and new ways to exploit them.

On a personal level, Trik hopes to one day retire, but he's in no hurry to boot himself up and out of the Capitol building yet. He has no desire to replace Finnian, whom he sees as taking care of all the worst

bits of running Nexopolis so that Trik can have all the fun.

## Nataal

*"We bill this place as a clean and friendly crossroads to all the worlds out there, but it doesn't get that way by itself, you know? There's a load of work that goes into making sure all those visitors from strange planets don't cause any trouble for the rest of us."* Justicar Nataal pushed her hat back on her head as she accepted a boat drink from the bartender at the Happy Hut with a grateful nod. *"It's a thankless job."*

*"No one ever says thank you?"*

Nataal shrugged. *"Sometimes, sure. Like when we just saved them from some shapeshifting monstrosity from the darkest parts of the Umber. Most the time, though, they just give us a wide berth and sing the praises of Horattio's little 'Goofs with Guns' club he's got patrolling through the Shacks. Nothing but a cheap gang of shakedown artists if you ask me."*

*"Then why don't you put a stop to it? To the Vigilance Committee, I mean."*

Nataal took a long sip from her bright pink drink and savored it while she considered the question. *"I suppose it's because they fit a certain role in this city, and I've learned to be careful about pulling pins out of any structure without being sure you got something to shore it back up on hand. Call them a necessary evil, if you will."*

*"But they're still evil?"*

*She lidded her eyes at me. "Honey, we're all evil."*

—Willa's notes

Nataal is a lean and rangy woman with an East Indian look. She bears a puncture scar in one of her cheeks that looks something like a dimple. She wears a tank top and shorts with a leather vest that bears her badge. Her sword rests in a bright blue scabbard that hangs from a belt around her hips.

Finnian found Nataal drinking herself to death in a dive bar in a backwater world, and he'd offered her a chance at redemption. She glommed onto it like a drowning woman, she cleaned herself up, and became the city's latest justicar. Since then, however, her faith in people has been tested and failed again and again, and she's all but given up.

The job might mean something to her—she takes a certain amount of pride in keeping the peace—but



the people don't. To her, they're the source of all the city's problems. She often opines that a thorough emptying of the Rocks and the Shacks might make this a decent place to live, if Finnian would allow it. Since that's not happening any time soon, she'd appreciate another drink.

## Attributes

- PSYCHE** — Average Rank
- STRENGTH** — Superior Rank
- ENDURANCE** — Superior Rank
- WARFARE** — 10 Points

## Powers

None. Nataal believes in herself and her own abilities over any kind of magic—with a couple of notable exceptions.

## Artifacts and Creatures

*The Justicar's Badge* [21 Points] — Nataal wears a badge as a symbol of her office, but it's not just a shiny bit of ornamentation. It helps keep her safe from the myriad threats she faces on a daily basis.

- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points] — The badge vibrates whenever there's something nearby that could present a threat to its wearer.
- Psychic Neutral [2 Points]
- Confers Psychic Neutral Ability [5 Points]
- Regeneration [4 Points]
- Confers Regeneration Power [10 Points]

*Nataal's Blade* [13 Points] — Nataal carries a magical blade that she's so good with that it often seems like an extension of her arm. She's so fast, she can actually knock bullets out of the air. It's a family heirloom that belonged to her mother, who was the chief of police back in her hometown—until she was gunned down in the line of duty. Nataal made it her job to hunt down and recover the blade from the men who took it—and then use it on them to exact her revenge.

- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]
- Confers Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons Ability [5 Points]

## Allies

*Partisan Support* [3 Points] — The Office of the Justicar isn't all that large—not when compared to the Office of Business Development—but it's well

armed and the people involved with it are all as loyal to Nataal as can be.

*Lord of the Gossamer Worlds* [5 Points] — While Finnian may not be as involved with the Office of the Justicar as he is with the rest of his administration, that doesn't mean he won't have Nataal's back if and when she needs the help. He prefers to ignore her and her complaints as much as he can, but he knows she has Nexopolis' best interests at heart. When she calls on him—which isn't often—he responds fast.

## Stuff

*Bad* [5 Points]

## Nataal as an Ally

Nataal doesn't do much as an ally, unless you need her help to keep Nexopolis safe. She doesn't much give a damn about what happens in other worlds or even on the Grand Stair, except as it might affect the city she protects. If you can show that your interests align with hers though, she's happy to lend you a hand for as long as that lasts.

## Nataal as an Enemy

Nataal is a terrifying enemy. As justicar, she acts as the judge, jury, and executioner in Nexopolis. She rarely abuses that power, if only so that when she does want to use it, her actions usually go unquestioned.

Those who cross Nataal, however, can expect to find themselves systematically hassled until they either leave the world or do something stupid enough that she—or the rest of her officers—can “take them down.” In her vernacular, taking someone down means either killing them or banishing them from the world, never to enter it again, under pain of immediate execution. Either way, from her point of view, the problem's been solved.

## Objectives

Nataal would love to just lock down Nexopolis and keep all the strangers out of it. She knows that's never going to happen, but she's not above tweaking hysteria over an incident to get Finnian to taper or restrict access for a while. Any time that happens, it's like she's been given a mini-vacation, and she can head back to the favorite part of her beat: helping the bars on the Beach test their latest frozen concoctions and taking in a spectacular sunset.

# Mother Girl

*"It's a cold and unforgiving world, little one, and if you think any differently you're fooling no one but yourself." Mother Girl studies the insides of the fish she just gutted as she speaks with me. She speaks with the voice of a teenager. "It's all we can do to find ourselves a little happiness in it, and when we do, we gotta hold on to it with both hands."*

*"Is that what you're doing here? With your cult?"*

*She giggles. Her eyes, though, do not shine with the curiosity of a teenager but burn with the wisdom of an old woman. "Is that what they're calling it up in the big building? That's adorable." She pokes through the fish's belly with her bare fingers and pulls out two lumps of flesh with her fingernails. They beat together like a pair of drums played in cadence.*

*"That's amazing." I peer down at the thumping things. "Are those hearts? It had two?"*

*"They didn't used to, this kind of fish." She wipes her hands on a filthy apron. "The world done that to them."*

*"The toxins mutated the poor thing?"*

*She gives me the kind of smile you'd use with an especially slow child. "The toxins tried to kill its ancestors. It mutated to survive that, all on its own."*

*I wrinkle my nose at the thought of spontaneous mutations brought on by the horrors the Dwinterlaik inflicted on this world. She laughs at me. "You think that's disgusting? To me, it's something beautiful."*

*"Why?"*

*"Think about it. This world tried to kill this fish. Tried to kill all the fish at once. Almost did it too. But the fish are too tough for the world. They find a way to survive, no matter what. That's a kind of magic, don't you think?"*

*I nod in agreement, and we watch those hearts until they fall still.*

*"Beautiful," she says with a deep reverence. "Beautiful."*

*—Willa's Notes*

Mother Girl looks like a skinny teenager with wild brown hair, but her eyes carry far more wisdom than her apparent years. She mostly wears shorts and flip-flops, along with a well-used apron.

Mother Girl hails from a Gossamer world called the Quiet Land, a small and quiet place of low technology and low magic in which little ever happened—until Mother Girl discovered the Umbra. She came into her powers at the age of fifteen, and

she still looks as if she's that age, despite the fact that she's at least two hundred years old. Controlling the people of her land offered her no challenge, and she soon became the most powerful creature there—until the arrival of the Office of Business Development from Nexopolis.

The Nexopolis agents introduced Mother Girl to the concept of Doors, which she'd never encountered before. When she realized that there were many worlds out there beyond her own, she decided that she had to see them for herself. Her dull little world had become intolerable.

Mother Girl wandered about the Grand Stair for years. She started out with an entourage of retainers, guards, and sycophants, but they parted from her one by one. Some decided to stay behind, and some were killed. Others were abandoned. A few escaped.

When Mother Girl reached Nexopolis, she stood alone, and she saw that she'd finally found the place she'd been searching for, a world she could call home. But it belonged to someone else.

Without her people around her, Mother Girl couldn't launch an assault upon Nexopolis and take it for herself. Even if she went back to her Domain and tried to raise an army, her people had never been that good at war. Even the Vigilance Committee was well-armed enough that Trik and his people could have destroyed any forces she would have raised.

But Mother Girl spied a hole in Finnian's plans. They relied on an underclass of workers brought in from other worlds, and those were people with minds of their own, folks who could be turned against him with a wicked word from a vicious tongue. All they would need then was the right kind of leader, one who didn't fear Finnian and his forces, one with the power to warp reality around her and—when the chance presented itself—wrest his power for herself.

Despite her youthful features, she'd learned a lot about patience over the centuries. She would talk, she would insinuate herself and her ideas, and she would wait.

Her time would come.

## Attributes

**PSYCHE** — 80 Points

**STRENGTH** — Paragon Rank

**ENDURANCE** — 20 Points

**WARFARE** — Paragon Rank



## Powers

*Umbr*a Mastery [50 Points] — Bored with reality as she knew it, Mother Girl wanted nothing less than to tear it all down and remold it in her own vision. Mastering control of the Umbra gave her the chance to do that, and she took to it with devilish glee.

*Invocation* [20 Points] — Mother Girl likes to use her *Invocation* powers to control others, but she's become wary of abusing the powers too much and drawing too much attention to herself before she's ready. While on Nexopolis, she's concentrated on trying to learn the True Names of the other Gossamer Lords who live there, and she's put a great deal of effort into concealing and warding her own True Name.

*Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points] — Mother Girl knows the ways of the Grand Stair, even if she hasn't explored it from one end to the other. If everything goes wrong for her in Nexopolis, she knows she can always return to it—and stage another attack against the land later.

## Artifacts and Creatures

*Mother Girl's Necklace* [12 Points] — This necklace features a dozen grotesque charms on it, each of which grants Mother Girl the power to cast a cantrip. All she has to do is touch the right charm and speak the right word. With it, she can use the following cantrips: Charm, Chill, Eidolon Negation, Foul, Heat, Nullify, Paralyze, Pain, Purify, Reveal, Spark, Stun.

- Contains Named and Numbered Cantrips [2 Points]
- Confers Named and Numbered Cantrips Power [10 Points]

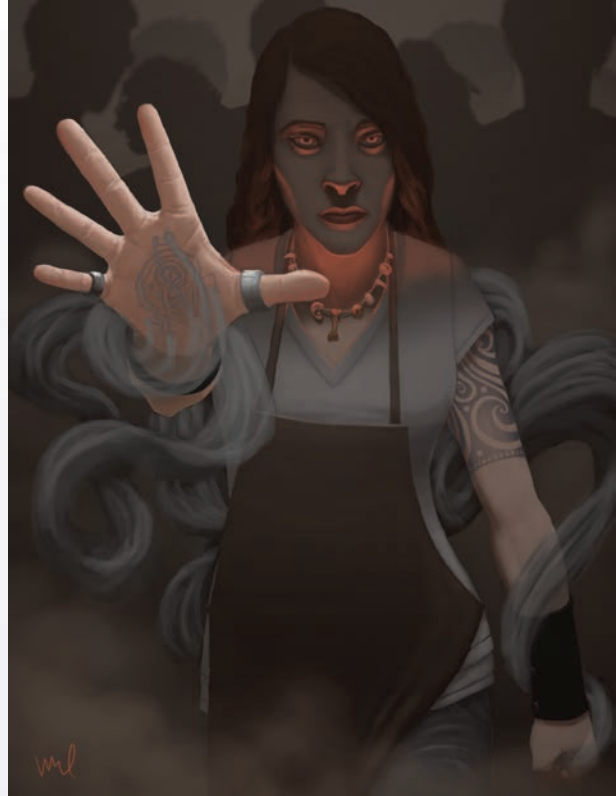
## Domain

**THE QUIET LAND** [2 Point] — The Quiet Land lies far off the beaten track on the Grand Stair, and it has little to offer visitors. Mother Girl rarely visits it these days, and the people of this world seem better off without her. To many of them, she's become a monstrous myth, and dire prophecies surround tales of her inevitable return.

- Personal Doman [1 Point]
- Communication Barrier [1 Point]

## Allies

*Partisan Support* [3 Points] — Through her preaching of insubordination against Finnian and



*Savior of the masses or threat to their existence? Mother Girl keeps her ultimate intentions to herself.*

dreaming of a Nexopolis that serves every resident equally, Mother Girl has garnered strong support among the people of the Rocks. She can call on them to do anything for her, up to and including inciting riots and committing murder.

## Stuff

*Bad* [5 Points]

## Mother Girl as an Ally

Mother Girl can be a powerful ally as long as your interests lie parallel to hers, but the moment they diverge, she can no longer be trusted. While she understands the importance of cutting deals, that's all they are to her. She never does a favor for anyone, believing that to be bad for both sides. She prefers to make arrangements up front instead.

Also, Mother Girl refuses to reveal the true extent of her power at any point. She wants the people of Nexopolis to think of her only as a crazy shaman who's managed to bring her delusions of power to town and infect the people of the Rocks with them. She trusts no one and refuses to do anything to

jeopardize that image until she's ready to make her move.

## Mother Girl as an Enemy

Mother Girl places no value on any life but her own. Her study of the Umbra has convinced her that all else is fungible, including her own nature. To her, other people—other creatures of any kind—are either tools she can use to get what she wants, or obstacles that stand in her way.

If it's easier to move around an obstacle, she's happy to do that. If it's simpler to remove the obstacle entirely, she does that instead. Many of the people who have stood against her over the years have simply disappeared.

Mother Girl often just disposes of the bodies of her foes on the Grand Stair, leaving them there to either rot or prove fodder for scavengers. If faced with someone she is not positive she can overpower immediately, she sometimes feigns friendship and brings them on a tour of the Grand Stair—and then abandons them in a remote world, slamming the Door behind her.

## Objectives

In the end, Mother Girl would love to rule over every world she can find—and even the Grand Stair itself. She is patient, though, and for the moment she has only set her sights on Nexopolis. To realize that plan, she continues to build her support in the Rocks, extending her influence into the Shacks.

Once her command of the Shacks is complete, Mother Girl plans to strike. At that point, she plans to push the outer neighborhoods straight into the sea. That will leave the Free-Trade Zone surrounded and helpless. Or so she believes.

## Citizens

The vast majority of the people who live, work, and relax here are regular folks without vital jobs, but that doesn't mean the heroes can't meet and work with them. Here are some details on the more notable ones.

### Riada

Riada is a fit and sharp middle-aged woman who serves as the director of the Office of Homeland Recovery. The previous person in the position actually

was a man named Garbonne, who served Finnian faithfully for over a hundred years. In many ways, Riada lives in his shadow, especially since she's not yet been able to solve his murder.

In fact, she's not even sure there was a murder to solve. Garbonne disappeared so suddenly and under such mysterious circumstances that it seems like the natural explanation, but no body ever turned up, so she's reserved judgment on the man's final fate.

Riada's office takes up the lowest of the habitable floors in the Capitol Building. While she doesn't have the largest force under her command (that belongs to the Office of Customs and Immigration, which oversees the Hub) or the most powerful (that would be the Office of Business Development) she still heads up what is supposedly Finnian's most important initiative: rebuilding the world Nexopolis is a part of.

Despite the distractions, Riada's had some success on that front. Using ancient maps, she's discovered another island to the west of Nexopolis, and she's preparing a team of people to explore it. With luck, she hopes to found a settlement on there, ideally by opening a Door to the place from an easily accessible part of the Grand Stair.

She's having a hard time finding volunteers to scour the island for her and make sure it's safe for settlers though. She spends a bit of time each day combing through the latest round of visitors, hoping to find some who might be willing to give her a hand.

### Markis

Markis was born in the Rocks, raised in the Shacks, and now resides on the Beach. He's driven and determined, and those qualities propelled him through the ranks of the administration until Finnian named him the head of the Office of Customs and Immigration. That put him in charge of levying tariffs, dealing with irate merchants, and evaluating countless requests for immigration or asylum.

Tall and wiry, Markis spends most of his waking moments in his office. When he's not there, though, meting out necessary judgments, he can usually be found in the Long Bar, one of the oldest businesses on the island. Markis spent many nights there in the back room, playing cards and cutting deals with the other movers and shakers in Nexopolis society, and he eventually bought—well, won—a small stake in the place.

More than a few people have accused Markis of corruption over the years, stating baldly that he demands bribes in addition to the tariffs he levies on behalf of Nexopolis. These rumors are, in fact, true,



but Finnian doesn't much mind. As long as Markis runs his department well—which he does, despite the complaints—he doesn't feel the need to do anything to stop him.

However, Finnian does have Riada, Trik, and Justicar Nataal keep a close eye on Markis. A person who can be bought is not one who can be implicitly trusted. If there's any weak point in Nexopolis's security, it's sure to be in Markis's department.

## Wan

Nexopolis isn't a big place, but there's a lot to know about it. Eventually, many may wish to slip away from their official guide (Willa) and investigate the island nation on their own. That's where Wan comes in. He bills himself as the premiere personal tourism professional on the island, and he's not shy about selling himself to anyone with even the slightest whiff of wealth or power about them.

Wan immigrated to Nexopolis by begging for asylum after hauling a load of meal printers into the Hub. It turned out that he'd stolen them—or, as he likes to tell it, neglected to properly arrange for payment for them—and he feared that agents of the original owners of the property would be waiting for him at his purported destination. He announced that he would rather stay in Nexopolis rather than walk through a Door that led straight to his doom.

In essence, he purchased his passage into Nexopolis with his stolen machines, which Markis confiscated rather than allow to be recovered by someone threatening one of Nexopolis's newest citizens with murder. This left Wan safe but jobless, and he immediately set to blowing through every last credit he had by exploring each bit of the island, particularly its seediest sections. By the time he ran out of funds, he was intimately familiar with every part of the city. Having few other marketable skills—coupled with an aversion to working for someone else ever again—he set himself up as a private guide to the city.

Wan is a hustler, and he makes no excuses for it. In fact, he highlights that fact to his clients, intimating with a wink and a nod that there isn't anything he cannot provide for them—or at least find someone who will.

Unknown to the rest of the island, he moonlights as an informant for Finnian. Although Wan has no direct way to reach the "Big Man," as Wan likes to call him, Finnian contacts him by icon every week or so, just to make sure Wan is still alive. In a pinch, if Wan has something he needs to tell Finnian right away, he does something to get arrested by Justicar Nataal or her deputies. She has standing orders to

let Finnian know if this happens—purportedly so he can consider banishing Wan.

## Doctors Freed

As a modern city with access to high-tech medicine, Nexopolis has a hospital—Nexopolis Mercy—that sits next to the Capitol Building, and it features an emergency room that's staffed around the clock by the same person: Doctor Freed. In truth, there are several doctors named Freed, each of whom is an identical clone of the others, fully trained via subconscious educational implantations. There are at least six different such doctors, each of which is fantastic at his job, although there may be more, possibly even some that have yet to be activated.

While each Doctor Freed is a wonderful and talented physician capable of performing any sort of medical procedure, from taking a temperature to replacing organs with regenerated copies, they don't share a single mind. They have access to a common database of notes they take during their work days, but any time you meet one of the Freeds, it's almost impossible to be sure which one he is. Conversations with him can sometimes feel as if you're speaking to someone with a creeping case of dementia because you can't be sure if he's the one who will remember you. This gets worse the more times you meet him, of course.

Despite this, Nexopolis Mercy recently launched a pilot program placing a Doctor Freed in flying ambulance that can get to any part of the island in under five minutes. The Freeds rotate through this position, which often brings them into the public eye. Some have commented that if one of the Freeds committed a crime, he'd either have the perfect alibi or no alibi at all.

While it's common to find a pair of Freeds working together in the hospital, especially around shift change, it's rare to spy more than three of them collected at once—except during terrible emergencies. And at those times, the Freeds don't stick around with each other to chat. They're too busy doing their jobs.

## Captain Kardy

While there are boats that ply the waters around Nexopolis, most of these are filled with fishers trying to bring in the day's catch. A number of people own private pleasure craft for sailing about the seas on warm, clear days—almost always during the dry season—but there are only a few captains who hang out

their shingles to offer their vessels for private charters. Captain Kardy is the most prominent of these.

Kardy is the opposite of the stereotypical sea captain. She's a petite woman with two young kids at home, whom her husband raises while she works the waves. She inherited the boat from her mother, who worked as a fisher for decades, a profession Kardy always hated.

Unwilling to take up fishing in her mother's place, Kardy instead decided to hire the boat out to tourists. The Thin Excuse is available for reasonable rates for deep-sea fishing (for which she puts out poles rather than using her mother's Right Net), snorkeling, diving, and even just exploring the island and enjoying a sunset cruise. She's willing to take on other jobs as well, but the rates become less reasonable as the risks and demands of those jobs go up.

Kardy has spotted the great white squid before, as well as many other strange and wondrous sea creatures, and she's happy to regale her customers with stories about them. She seems entirely clueless that such terrors might put potential clients off from taking advantage of her services. Or perhaps she's happy to let such landlubbers remain ashore if they can't stomach a tale of the briny deep. Those kinds of folks tend to make for terrible boaters in any case.

## Adano

Adano is the manager of the Beach House, the largest hotel in Nexopolis. It sits in the Beach, of course, and overlooks a quarter mile of sandy shoreline. The place started out as housing for Finnian's first group of workers, but when he moved the administration to the Capitol Building on the northern shore, he gave the place to Adella, one of his finest assistants, as a retirement present. She added on to it, as did her children and grandchildren, transforming it from little more than a barracks to a luxurious resort.

As that woman's distant descendant, Adano now runs the place on behalf of the whole of the Adella family, the members of which occupy an entire floor of the hotel's west wing. It's not always easy to balance the needs of the relatives with the demands of his guests, but Adano's proven adept enough at this tough job that no one else has stepped up to try to take it from him yet. Many of them have been spoiled by their all-inclusive rent-free lifestyle, which only requires them to work for luxuries the hotel cannot provide—or which are not being used by the guests.

This often puts Adano in a tough position between his family and his wife, Helle, who cannot understand why he doesn't put the screws to his least valu-

able relatives when the occasion calls for it. On the other hand, the threat she represents to the status quo has led many members of the Adella family to trim back on their requests of Adano. A number of them have even come forward to personally express their gratitude to him.

Adano despairs, however, of finding someone to take over the family business from him when he's ready to indulge himself in a well-deserved retirement. He and Helle don't have any children, and none of his many nieces, nephews, and cousins seem willing to step up and take on his mantle. He's a few year off from that point, but he can see the day coming, and Helle refuses to let him work himself to death before he reaches it.

Despite all that, Adano is a handy islander to know. His family has been here forever, and he personally knows all of the most powerful visitors to Nexopolis. There's little that goes on in the Beach that he isn't aware of on some level, mostly because everyone knows they can count on his complete discretion.

## Outsiders

While most of the people who live in Nexopolis are full-fledged citizens, the island also sees a large number of transients passing through. Some of these are merchants. Others are their world's equivalent of caravan leaders, paid to move large quantities of goods from one world to another along the Grand Stair.

## Jahari

Lady Jahari, as she prefers to be called, hails from a nomadic people who roam the sands of her world, farming rain from the sky. She works for her world's Lord, Kalazar, a man who appears to his people as a genie capable of granting their wishes—which he can, to an extent, but he also employs more mundane means to meet their needs. One part of that is opening trade with other worlds via the Hub.

Jahari doesn't always understand the sorts of trade missions Kalazar sends her on. To her mind, the only thing her people have to trade is sand, sand, and more sand. As it turns out, her world's sand is extremely fertile when exposed to their limited water, which is how life managed to evolve there in the first place. There are many worlds in which such incredible fertilizer stays in high demand. All Jahari



has to do is find their leaders and convince them to buy it from her.

Jahari's first shipment of fertilizer didn't even make it out of Nexopolis. Once Markis—who heads up the Office of Customs and Immigration—spotted it, he immediately cut her a deal for a number of Shady Hats. Jahari suspects he ripped her off, but she also knows that getting in good with Markis can only help her, so she went along with it anyhow.

Jahari often just passes through town now, finishing deals with one world or another. As new as she is to this game, though, she sometimes has to spend time roaming around and looking for other merchants in the Free-Trade Zone. Since she doesn't have the resources to wander about the Grand Stair herself—at least not safely—this is the best way for her to meet the most potential partners.

Jahari is lobbying Kalazar to provide her with the credits to set up an office here in Nexopolis. Until she can persuade him that this is the right course of action, however, she usually stays at the Beach House, which gives her easy access to many of the most popular meeting sites outside of the Free-Trade Zone.

## Kalishnov

Kalishnov doesn't much care who she works for, as long as the credits wind up in her account when they're supposed to. She has a full platoon of mercenaries to support, after all, and they get stabby if they don't get paid on time. When that happens, she prefers to send them to chat up the deadbeat clients rather than argue the matter herself, and that means that few people are stupid enough to try to stiff her.

Kalishnov is a master of all forms of armed combat, from the stone dagger all the way up to the laser-guided grenade teleporter, and she demands the same from every one of her warriors. They often don't know what kind of world they might be called to, and too much reliance on technology or magic could mean an early and ignominious death for them all. She's lost too many good people due to such mistakes to ever make any exceptions again, no matter how good they might be with a wand.

Kalishnov hires out her team to the highest bidder. They're not large enough to invade a world or even take over a nation. When it comes to escorting your goods safely from one world to the other, they're the best there is—or so they say. The Door-men and the Raven Legion might take exception with that, but not to Kalishnov's face.

Kalishnov and her team aren't above taking advantage of things they learn while shopping their



*When you want your goods to reach their destination, Kalishnov is the person to see that done — For the right price, of course.*

services around. If a merchant refuses to use any guards for a particularly juicy shipment, that merchant often goes missing shortly after leaving Nexopolis, never to return. The goods usually wind up where they were meant to go in the first place—or wind up diverted to another buyer who's willing to pay even more.

## Lancosta

Nexopolis isn't just a great place to move product. It's also a wonderful escape. At least that's what Lancosta thought when he arrived here last year with a mountain of credits and a squad of robotic guards reprogrammed to be loyal to him.

Lancosta made himself a wealthy man in a high-tech world by skimming the profits from its Lord's world-ruling monopoly. He knew he would be discovered eventually, and when that happened, he executed his plan—along with a few of the junior members of his firm, who had hoped to turn him in for a juicy reward. Then he made off onto the Grand Stair, courtesy of the robots, which had been given that ability by his boss.

Lancosta had heard of Nexopolis and made for it straight away. Once there, he posed as a new merchant sent to set up deals in the Free-Trade Zone. He rented a luxurious suite of rooms at the Beach House and ordered the robots to protect him at any cost.

Lancosta knows his days are numbered. He can only avoid retribution for his thievery for so long. However, he's determined to live as well as he can for as long as he can—or at least until his stolen money runs out.

As far as anyone in Nexopolis knows, Lancosta is just another well-heeled merchant determined to throw enough money around to make himself look important. He encourages that belief, hoping that an opportunity to make another big score or find a new refuge might somehow present itself. He knows it's a race between his luck and that of his boss, though, and until it all comes crashing down on him, he plans to play the role of the wealthy playboy to the hilt.

## Marsen

Marsen seems like he's just one more bum living in a hut near the Beach—which are all priced too high for anyone without serious money to afford. He drinks hard, smokes too much, and spends most of his time chatting up women who are lying in the sun. Out there, the biggest problem he has is an irate husband or boyfriend taking a jealous poke at him.

He claims to be independently wealthy, a black sheep descended from Vala who has been paid off to stay far away from her and the rest of the family. In fact, he's a con artist and a thief, living here in Nexopolis on his ill-gotten gains. He has a safe house deep in the Shacks, where he disappears to any time he feels threatened, but when he's on the prowl, he hangs out on the Beach for days, casing new targets for his next burglary.

Marsen has yet to be accused of a crime in Nexopolis. He bought his way into this world with the money from a huge score, and he'd planned to go clean. He just can't help himself, though, and he's already turned his eye toward selling his stolen goods to buyers in other worlds, as there's no better way of making it hard for anyone to trace what he's done.

Marsen believes there's no situation he can't bargain or talk his way out of, and so far he's proven himself right—he refuses to kill for any amount of money, although he might be forced into doing so in self-defense. Afterward, he goes back to lying low on the Beach and looking for less controversial types of trouble—at least for the moment.

## The Doormen

During the war with the Dwimmerlaik, Drake created an order of knights to help him protect the Grand Stair. Formally known as the Ostiarium, most people call them the Doormen, likely because a number of them are charged with guarding important Doors along the Grand Stair. Despite this, they aren't always found hanging out by Doors, as they can pursue trouble anywhere on Drake's behalf.

The people of Nexopolis know the Doormen well, and the Office of Business Development has a long-standing relationship with them. Trik often shares important information about incipient threats with the Doormen, and they reciprocate when they discover anything that might affect Nexopolis. Sometimes they even work together in the field.

## The Raven Legion

The Raven Legion is, by far, the best-known mercenary organization on the Grand Stair. Since Nexopolis doesn't maintain a standing army, Finnian reserves the right to hire the Raven Legion to do some work for him whenever he deems it necessary. The presence of the Raven Legion may make some people in Nexopolis nervous, but Finnian claims that he doesn't need such people as customers.

The Raven Legion has an office in the Free-Trade Zone that's open to the public. It's far more polished than Kalishnov's place. The Raven Legion is arguably the finest private military force around (they'd argue this for sure), and they command a premium price based upon this reputation, which they protect at all costs.

Trik doesn't care for the Raven Legion, although he understands why Finnian enjoys the discount the mercenaries give him in exchange for his tacit endorsement. The OBD usually calls on the Doormen instead, as Trik prefers to rely on warriors that fight for a cause rather than for a check.

## The Porters

The Ancient and Honorable Guild of Porters started out as a loose conglomeration of quartermasters for the Gossamer Lords during the Dwimmerlaik war. When that conflict ended, they realized that a lot of people still needed to get their goods from one world to another, and they provide that service—for a solid fee. Their company continues to this day, growing stronger and more stable with each passing year.



The Porters have an office in the Free-Trade Zone too, and they do tremendous business out of it. A number of merchants that make it to Nexopolis find that they don't have the personnel to continue on their own. The Porters stand ready to help them make their deals and live up to their obligations. They don't come cheap, but they are as firm and steady as a mountain of rock.

## The Dendaros

The Dendaros are the most common nonhuman race in the Agora. They have red skin, horned heads, the legs of a goat, and black-clawed hands. In short, they look like devils, although they are just as honorable or deceitful as any other group of people. To blend in among other groups, the Dendaros psychically disguise themselves, which is effective on any observer with a Psyche of Peak Rank or lower.

Most Dendaros prefer the Agora over Nexopolis, favoring the freewheeling and frontier aspects of the place, but the island city has too much to offer for these merchants to completely ignore it. Enough of them have settled in Nexopolis that they do sometimes show their real forms in public. This is especially true in Little Hell, their corner of the Shacks.

## The Known Lords

The well-known Gossamer Lords all know about Nexopolis, and most of them have strong opinions on it. They may escort other Lords there to introduce them around, send them there on a mission, or warn them against entering via the Hub. It all depends on how they view Finnian and his wild plan to build trading routes among the worlds.

## Calais

Cal sees Nexopolis as a wonderful experiment. He's new enough at exploring the Grand Stair himself that he doesn't see any potential harm in such an ambitious project. He often cuts through the Hub on his way from one place to another, and upon occasion he's been known to spend time here as well.

Because Cal has so little invested so far in the intricate politics that swirl around the Gossamer Lords, he feels he can be candid with Finnian, which the older man finds refreshing. Finnian and Calais have become fast friends, and Cal has a standing invitation to stay at Finnian's place at the Beach when-

ever he's in town. Most of the time, he takes Finnian up on this, but he doesn't allow that to restrict him from exploring other parts of the island as well.

## Bastiano

Until recently, Nexopolis hasn't meant much to Bastiano. He occasionally used it as a means of securing his supply lines for his armies, but while Finnian is happy to move lots of merchandise through the Hub, he frowns on transporting troops through it. Now that Finnian's located and mapped out so many other worlds though, Bastiano covets not only the city itself but the information the Office of Business Development has gathered.

He's not quite ready to make his move yet, as Nexopolis is still more use to him as a neutral ground. The moment Bastiano needs it for some vital part of a plan though, Finnian had better think hard about refusing any of his demands. The calculus will finally add up to taking over the city himself, whether by economics or force.

## Dayle

Always a seeker of knowledge, Dayle adores Nexopolis not only for how easy it makes it for her to reach new places, but also for the efforts Finnian has made at exploring and mapping out remote parts of the Grand Stair. If she didn't prefer to be on her own, she might have set up something similar herself. As it is, she's happy to take advantage of Finnian's hard work and occasionally trade information with him directly.

Dayle has no permanent residence here, although when she visits she usually chooses some place near the Capitol. While the residences there are not as fashionable or delightful as a place at the Beach, it's far more pragmatic, giving her easier access to Finnian and keeping her from the roving eyes of the occasional crooks and con artists who ply the wealthier parts of the island.

## Drake

As veterans of the war against the Dwimmerlaik, Drake and Finnian go back centuries. When Finnian's world fell, Drake took in Finnian and gave him and his people shelter in his Domain, Ineswitrin. He also set Finnian up with the initial supplies he needed to launch his effort to rebuild his home world, starting with Nexopolis.

Now that Finnian has reestablished himself, he has not forgotten Drake's kindnesses. The Office of



*Nataal, Horatio, and other notable members of Nexopolis' layered social ladder.*

Business Development constantly gathers new information about possible Dwimmerlaik activity, and Finnian roots through it and analyzes it during regular meetings with Drake. If and when the Dwimmerlaik return, Finnian has offered Nexopolis as a means of transporting Drake's troops to lead a first strike against them, an arrangement he would not make with anyone else.

## Lucien

Without Lucien's help, Finnian would never have been able to develop Nexopolis into the successful trading post it's become. Lucien consulted with Finnian from the start, helping him set up the network of Doors that comprise the Hub, without which the entire venture would have failed. In return, Finnian shares everything that he learns about the Grand Stair through any means, including the Office of Business Development.

Despite his overt support of Finnian's aims, he doesn't reciprocate and reveal everything he knows about the Grand Stair as well. While Finnian wants to rebuild his world, Lucien is far more interested in

the well-being of the Grand Stair itself than any single world—or even the Gossamer Lords themselves.

## Vala

Finnian, of course, has known Vala for centuries, and the two have a solid working relationship. However, Finnian sometimes harbors some bitterness about the fact that his world fell before the Dwimmerlaik because he believes that Vala didn't allocate enough resources to protect it. Intellectually he knows she was under no obligation to give him special treatment and that there may not have been much she could have done to force a different outcome for his home. Emotionally, though, doubt eats at him and breeds a quiet resentment.

For that reason, those who are not happy with Vala's leadership over the Gossamer Lords often meet in Nexopolis rather than Shatterlight. Since Finnian has little standing as a leader of the Gossamer Lords, Nexopolis is viewed as a more neutral territory, a place where others can speak more openly. Despite that, all who meet there aren't so foolish to believe that Vala is unaware of their gathering or their intentions, and Finnian takes care to ensure that no one ever calls for open rebellion.



# New Things

Nexopolis is filled with all sorts of wondrous items, spells, cantrips, and creatures. While most of these are particular to Finnian's home, Gamemasters are free to adapt them to other places in their campaigns as they like.

## The Nexopolis Domain

In game terms, Nexopolis is the Domain of Finnian. This was once a Primal World, but after the war with the Dwimmerlaik, much of its power and secrets have been destroyed or lost. In that sense, it's more like Common Ground these days. With a determined investigation, though, some of those secrets might be unearthed.

As for Security, Nexopolis is a mixed bag. There are absolutely no restrictions on communications to and from this world. Nexopolis relies on such freedoms for its business model. Without them, their customers would find it much harder to make use of the city's services.

There are many Doors that enter Nexopolis, and even more of them used to give access to the rest of the world. This may have been the world's greatest strength, but it also proved to be its fatal flaw. Most of those Doors were destroyed in the war with the Dwimmerlaik, and those few that survived those attacks are unreliable at best. The only ones that can be counted on are those located on Nexopolis.

Making new Doors into Nexopolis is strictly regulated by the Office of Business Development and Finnian. If the OBD come upon a Door created by someone outside of the administration, fashioned without the appropriate permissions and registrations, they take steps to either commandeer or destroy it.

When possible, such rogue Doors are maintained, although under the Office of Business Development's supervision. If the owner of the location where the Door emerges into Nexopolis doesn't care to work with the administration, the property can be taken by the city and those owners are evicted.

Otherwise, the Door must be destroyed on this end to render it dysfunctional. The owner has the option to take care of this duty, but the Office of Business

Development stands ready to step in whenever necessary.

The Office of Business Development has all Doors in Nexopolis cataloged and registered. The most important and accessible ones have around-the-clock guards established on both sides. The next level down have full-time staff watching them from the Nexopolis side. There are many more obscure Doors, and each of these are fitted with security systems that monitor and record every entrance and exit.

The cameras that do this are connected to threat-recognition software that sounds an alarm if any dangerous entities gain access through these Doors. They're set off by known troublemakers profiled in Justicar Nataal's database, as well as by people carrying weapons. Any sign of a Dwimmerlaik (should they return from the void of Shadow) springs a red alert and the fastest, most severe response available, up to and including instant destruction of the Door.

It's probably no surprise that Finnian has Control of Destiny when it comes to Nexopolis. This is the main reason he's been able to maintain control of it over the years, and it also helped him weather the near-total destruction inflicted upon it during the war with the Dwimmerlaik.

It's rare to find Finnian wandering any farther than the Grand Stair these days, and he spends most of his time firmly back in Nexopolis. Rebuilding the city and eventually the world is the driving purpose in his life, and he now has people to wander the Gossamer worlds for him.

After the world of his Domain was nearly destroyed, Finnian actually used his Control of Time Flow over Nexopolis to cause the world's time to speed up. Decades spun by in a matter of weeks, allowing him and his fellow refugees to raise Nexopolis from the ashes in seemingly little time by the standards of the Grand Stair. It also helped bleed off a lot of the background radiation and toxins, things that Gossamer Lords could survive but would likely kill others.

By the time Finnian reopened Nexopolis and announced his new, concentrated business model, the island was arguably habitable, and he allowed the progression of time to once more synch with the Grand Stair. It wouldn't do to be too much faster or slower than his clientele.

# Cantrips

Under Finnian's guidance, Nexopolis is always developing new ways to take advantage of both technology and magic. To that end, he and his staff have created a number of new cantrips. Here are eight of them.

**Chill** ("Refrigero!"). With a fanning of the hand, this cantrip reduces the temperature around a single person or item. It can be used to refresh someone on a hot day, or to act as a balm to sunburn or a fever. It only lasts for as long as a snowball in the summer.

**Draw** ("Scribo!"). This cantrip allows the caster to draw or write on any dry surface with the tip of a finger. It leaves behind a mark in the finger's path. What the caster creates with that marking is up to her, and the quality of it depends on whatever artistic ability she may have. The effect only lasts for several seconds, although the mark remains behind after the cantrip expires.

**Heat** ("Calesco!"). With a rubbing together of the hands, this cantrip imparts warmth to a person or item. This is enough to reheat a meal or thaw a frozen lock. It can help stave off the cold for at least as long as a hot mug of coffee.

**Mend** ("Corrigo!"). This cantrip allows the caster to fix small cracks or chips in an item the way someone else might with a tube of superglue. It doesn't permit the caster to reattach bits that are broken off if they're thicker than a pencil. It can also be used to fix a small blemish, cut, or scratch on a person, as long as the injury is no more than skin deep. Some use it to heal shaving nicks.

**Purify** ("Purifico!"). With this cantrip, the caster makes a small amount of food or drink clean to consume. This is enough to affect anything on a dinner plate or in a glass, mug, stein, goblet, and so on. It removes all poisons and toxins permanently, although it doesn't affect the flavor or quality of the food or drink itself. Some use this cantrip at every meal, and it's common for merchants in Nexopolis who drink together to employ this cantrip as a toast. It's fine to trust your drinking partners, but it's even better to be sure about what you're drinking.

Since it removes all toxins, this cantrip also removes the alcohol from a drink. Some Nexopolians have been rumored to use it to win at drinking contests, although that would, of course, be cheating.

**Smack** ("Quatio!"). With a quick knock or slap, this cantrip makes a flaky item work again. This won't repair something that is entirely broken, but it can get a crashed or buggy bit of tech working again,

at least for a few precious moments. It also puts an instant end to a Glitch cantrip.

**Spark** ("Scintilla!"). With a snap of the fingers, this cantrip produces a small spark. It only lasts for as long as the snap itself, but this is enough to ignite a fire if there is something flammable at hand.

**Stick** ("Obhaeresco!"). This cantrip allows the user to stick an item to a dry, flat surface. The item in question cannot weigh more than a pound, and the surface must be stable, preferably something like a wall or a door (or Door). The item sticks there until it is disturbed, at which point the cantrip ends.

Many use this cantrip to leave notes for others, anything from warnings to welcomes. It's also a fine way to put small items near at hand for easy access—or to hide them in unexpected places as well.

# Spells

The research Finnian and his team have worked on while rebuilding Nexopolis also extends to sorcerous spells. Each spell described here follows the same rules as those in *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow*, with regards to title, a description of its effects, a suggested casting time, common lynchpins, and in some cases, variations, with optional lynchpins in italics.

**Alarm**. This spell enchants a location so that any people or creatures hostile to the caster trigger an alarm. When such a hostile enters the area, the caster—or a designated recipient—receives a psychic alert strong enough to awaken anyone instantly from a deep sleep. It normally has a range of one mile, although it is often restricted to a smaller area to reduce the chance of false alarms. It can be made to conform to any shape, including that of a building or a plot of land, and the object (if portable) can move normally. It normally lasts for a full day.

**CASTING TIME:** Thirty minutes, plus five minutes per lynchpin.

**LYNCHPINS:** Area of Effect, Gossamer Magic, Duration, Dispel, *Independent*, *Linked*, Linked Subject.

**Blight**. This spell causes all of the vegetation within the area of effect to wither and die, up to a full acre at a time. All higher forms of life are unaffected, although they can feel the magic harming the environment around them. The people of Nexopolis stumbled across this spell as they were researching the Bounty spell, although they don't use it much.



Finnian takes a staunch stance against such magic, as it reminds him far too much of the Dwimmerlaik destruction of his world. However, it might not be beyond a merchant to use it to wither one farmer's crops and manufacture a demand—or at least higher prices—for his own.

**CASTING TIME:** Thirty minutes, plus five minutes per lynchpin.

**LYNCHPINS:** Area of Effect, Gossamer Magic, *Duration*, *Dispel*.

**Bounty.** With this spell, the caster can cause existing plants to grow instantly to vibrant maturity under even the worst conditions. It affects up to a full acre at a time. The plants are normal plants for their type, and if they bear fruit, it is ripe.

Finnian developed this spell when he began his campaign to reclaim Nexopolis. It ensured that he and his people had a steady supply of food at hand without having to travel through the Grand Stair to import it.

**CASTING TIME:** Thirty minutes, plus five minutes per lynchpin.

**LYNCHPINS:** Area of Effect, Gossamer Magic, Environment, *Type of Seeds*.

**Control Weather.** With this spell, the caster can affect the weather in a five-mile radius around her own location. She can gather clouds to cause any form of precipitation or drive away the clouds to prevent it. The difficulty of bringing about a new kind of weather depends on the normal weather in the area. It's a challenge to bring a blizzard to the desert, for instance, although not impossible.

Finnian's people use this spell to drive away the bad weather that plagues Nexopolis as often as they can. Once the rainy season starts, though, it often becomes too much of a challenge for them to be able to manage it well with any regularity.

**CASTING TIME:** One hour, plus ten minutes per lynchpin.

**LYNCHPINS:** Area of Effect, Gossamer Magic, *Duration*, *Dispel*, Severity of Weather Change.

**Decay.** With this spell, the caster causes any unliving items within its area of effect—fifty yards from its center—to fall into ruin. They rust, rot and fall to pieces as if neglected and left exposed to the elements for a brutal and inclement decade. This spell counteracts a Preserve spell, ending it immediately.

Finnian detests the use of this kind of magic. He does acknowledge its use in clearing out areas that are otherwise infested with dead things, but it brings

up far too many memories of the destruction of his world for him to ever feel comfortable with it.

**CASTING TIME:** One hour, plus ten minutes per lynchpin.

**LYNCHPINS:** Area of Effect, Gossamer Magic

**Preserve.** This spell puts any unliving items within its area of effect—fifty yards from its center—into stasis. The passage of time does not affect them for up to a full week. This works even better than a refrigerator to keep food and other perishable items fresh. With regular application of the spell, such items can be kept perfectly preserved forever, no matter their normal shelf life.

Finnian himself came up with this spell, which he designed to help protect the materials he had on hand for rebuilding Nexopolis. He realized it could be put to great use with trading among worlds as well, ensuring that the goods brought to Nexopolis wouldn't spoil while their owner found a buyer.

**CASTING TIME:** One hour, plus ten minutes per lynchpin.

**LYNCHPINS:** Area of Effect, Gossamer Magic, *Duration*, *Dispel*.

## Artifacts

Nexopolis has a number of artifacts specific to its world that have been created over the years. Some of these are small, handy devices, while others are entire installations that cannot be removed—at least not without a crane. Many of these devices are a blend of science and magic designed by Marsheeba, although she can't take credit for them all. Outside of Nexopolis, these items won't work properly or at all.

## The Preservation Halls

Nexopolis thrives on goods and materials passing through its Doors, but some of those items are perishable. The longer they have to be in Nexopolis—for whatever reason—the less valuable they become. Finnian came up with the Preserve spell to help keep things fresh, and that worked well when traffic through the Hub was still low.

In today's high-volume environment, Finnian would need a full-time team of sorcerers to keep up with the demand. Despite such needs, even he had to concede that this wouldn't be a good use of any-

one's time. Instead, he tasked Marsheeba with creating the Preservation Halls.

The rooms behind four of the doors in the Hub—the ones that sit at the cardinal points of the compass—have been ensorcelled so that anything that sits inside them automatically is under the influence of a Preserve spell. These spells have been woven into the walls, floor, and ceiling of the halls so that they do not have to be renewed. They work all the time, every time.

## Finnian's Flask

When he first came back to Nexopolis, Finnian brought much of what he needed with him. He and that early group of helpers immediately set up a plot of land to farm and magically produced enough for them to live on. It didn't make for a great diet, but it was enough to sustain the group until they could establish steady sources of supplies along the Grand Stair.

Most of that section of the island has now been transformed into Concentric Park. Finnian still considers it as a last resort for farming should disaster strike the island, but he hasn't called on it for that purpose in years. Few of the island's residents remember it as anything but the park.

One thing the farm couldn't produce that was in high demand was alcohol. To solve that particular problem, Finnian developed a special sort of stainless steel flask. All the user has to do is fill it with water, tap it three times, and recite the inscription engraved on the side. It reads: *To health. To happiness. To heroes.*

Once that's done, half of the water inside the flask transforms into grain alcohol, forming a sort of moonshine best used for thinning paint. But, as Finnian likes to say, "It'll do in a pinch. Pinch me again, please."

These flasks have become family heirlooms throughout the island, and having one marks the owner as a person in Finnian's favor—or at least the close relative of one. Being caught with a stolen flask merits banishment from Nexopolis, at the very least.

Finnian still makes them from time to time, to hand out to especially valued employees, but they're much rarer these days. Those who have them often have special pockets sewn into their best outfits, in which they can tote around their flask and share its bounty with friends.



*A bit or a swig from Finnian's Flask will clear more than sinuses.*

## The Right Net

Making sure the people of Nexopolis could feed themselves somehow if trade went down—or didn't develop fast enough—was a huge concern for Finnian in the city's early days. Along with farming, he took to the island's other natural resource: seafood. The trouble was that the waters around Nexopolis were filled with far more dangerous creatures than simply fish, and if a boat managed to catch the wrong kind of beast in its net, it could wind up destroyed with all hands lost.

With a specially engineered net, the fishers could manage to get only the fish they wanted, not ones that were too small or—often worse—too big. But the nets could be tricky, and they could only discriminate by size. That meant the fishers would sometimes catch young monsters that were only slightly less dangerous than their full-grown kin.

To solve this problem, Finnian asked Marsheeba to create a net that would only catch what it was supposed to. It took her several trials, but she finally managed it. She calls the result the Right Net.

To use a Right Net, you simply gather it up and then tell it what you want it to catch—the Net has a slight psychic aura that can pick up the wielder's



thoughts. You can be as specific or as broad as you like. For instance, you can range from “anything” all the way down to “male sunfish tuna between five and seven feet long.” If something that fits the description winds up in the net, it is instantly caught. Otherwise, the net lets it go free.

It didn't take long for the people ashore to realize such nets could be used for more than just catching fish, although their size makes them unwieldy for use on the surface. Every member of the Justice's Office carries a handheld version for capturing troublemakers, which Nataal much prefers to using lethal force. It's not that she's against killing people who need it, but people who die tend to have relatives who miss them. Starting a war on her island would be the opposite of keeping the peace, so she tries to keep that from happening when she can.

The members of the Vigilance Committee can't get their hands on these relatively rare nets, but they prefer to mete out justice in the old-fashioned way: with clubs and fists.

## Shady Hat

Nexopolis is many things to many people, but no matter who you are or where you come from, one thing remains the same: it's a tropical island. Many people aren't used to the intensity of the sunlight at such latitudes, and not all of them happen to be Gossamer Lords who are tough enough to brave any level of sunburn. For those people, Marsheeba invented the Shady Hat.

A Shady Hat is made of a loose weave of sunbaked straw, but it's been enchanted so that the wearer is immune to the ravages of the sun. No matter how hot the weather gets, the wearer doesn't need to sweat it, literally.

The Shady Hat isn't tough enough to protect someone against things like fire or lava, of course. It just keeps the wearer comfortably cool, no matter how sunny the day might be. They're popular at the Beach, of course, but people can be found wearing them in any part of the city, even on the Rocks.

These items are a lot more common than any of the others. Visitors are usually offered one if they decide to leave the Hub area and investigate the rest of the island. They're supposed to return them when they leave, but there's a high loss rate. Many people abscond with them, and they take pride in the fact that a Shady Hat marks them as a well-traveled person to anyone who's heard of Nexopolis.

## Creatures

Nexopolis is home not only to people from all around the known worlds, but also to a few unusual creatures. Finnian is extremely cautious about introducing new species into the island's environment, and it's generally not allowed. Sometimes, however, things get loose and reproduce despite best efforts to prevent it. And other times they've been there the entire time, lurking.

## Coconut Rats

When Finnian returned to Nexopolis, not much of the native fauna had survived. There were some fish in the ocean. Some insects—especially those that could burrow into the earth—had survived. And then there were the rats.

The rats on Nexopolis dug their way into the coconuts hanging from the surviving palm trees around the island, and there they stayed, feasting on the coconuts until they ran out of food. Almost all of them died.

One of them found a holy coconut that had been handed down from shaman to shaman on the island throughout countless generations. After feeding on that, the rat discovered it had a strange but extremely useful power. It could teleport from the inside of a coconut to the inside of any other coconut on the island.

This helped it avoid not only the ravages of the war but the attacks of other predators that hoped to kill the rat—or at least to keep it out of their food supplies. Every time someone came after it, it would crawl into a coconut and disappear. By the time the pursuer could crack open the coconut, the rat would be inexplicably gone.

The rat bred with other rats, and the ability spread. Fortunately, the ability seems to be rare, and less than a quarter of the rats on the island have it. Those that do, though, tend to live longer than those that don't.

The rats also have eyes that glow a bright red, especially in the dark. When you walk through Nexopolis at night and gaze up at a coconut tree, you might spy a set of those eyes staring back at you from the foliage. Or you might spy a whole lot of them at once.

## The Rocks Prowler

Nexopolis has no native alpha predators. In an island as small as this one, there's not enough prey around for a breeding population of such large and vicious animals to get by. Once the people arrived, the island became even less hospitable to such beasts.

However, in recent years, there have been dozens of reports of some kind of strange, black-furred beast slinking around the Rocks. It supposedly tears people to shreds and then disappears into the night. No one in the administration, though, has been able to confirm a sighting of it.

The creature is actually Mother Girl, who's transformed her body into that of a twisted panther with her Umbra Mastery power. In this way, she prowls the darkness around the rocks, on the lookout for people hunting her human form. When she finds such nosy folks, she waits until she can corner them alone, and then she attacks.

A few of Mother Girl's followers have made the connection between her and the Rocks Prowler, but they think it's some kind of actual, separate creature she's controlling with her black magic. They have no idea that the beast is actually her.

If they did, they'd be her next victims.

## The White Squid

The waters around Nexopolis have long been plagued with all sorts of deformed sea creatures mutated by the radiation and toxins that plague the planet. While the area around the island may be relatively clean, such beasts often roam across wide areas. The smarter, more daring, or more desperate ones search for cleaner hunting zones themselves, and a few of them are adventurous enough to wander near Nexopolis.

Most of these creatures don't live for long. The fishers who ply the waves around the island know the administration has a bounty out on such beasts—or even for just solid information about them. The moment one of them is spotted, word goes back to the Capitol Building, and a hunting party launches soon after.

The one creature that's managed to evade death or capture for years, is the great white squid. This albino creature once lived in the ocean's darkest depths, but the combination of pollution falling into its habitat, along with the way clouds of ash blotted out the sun, beckoned the beast to try its luck closer to the water's surface—or so the official theory goes. By all reports, it measures at least a hundred yards

long, and its arms are strong enough to pull down and dismember any boat that calls Nexopolis's harbor home.

In truth, the great white squid is a sapient creature from another world far along the Grand Stair. Years ago, when it was much smaller, it hitched a ride in a tank of seafood being imported through Nexopolis, and the tank was placed in a Preservation Hall soon after it arrived. Since it was not dead, the stasis field in that part of the Hub didn't work on it, and the creature managed to mentally take control of one of the workers there.

The worker smuggled the white squid out, but the communications between the squid and the worker were garbled by their vast differences. The squid wanted to go home, but the worker only could understand that the squid wanted to be returned to the ocean, so that's where he took the creature. Angry and frustrated, the squid attacked and killed the worker right there on the shore. Unable to find any other help, the creature slunk into the waves, escaping Nexopolis but also cutting itself off from its only way home.

The squid has grown to massive proportions over the decades since. It's still been unable to fully communicate its desires to any humans, and at this point it has given up. It has managed to control its temper a bit as it's matured, but it still feels the need to take out its frustrations when it gets close to reaching someone and fails yet again.

## A Quick Guide to Creating Non-Powered Characters

While *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow* concerns itself mostly with Gossamer Lords, of course, most of the people who live in Nexopolis are ordinary souls. Still, that doesn't mean there aren't any differences among them, especially when compared to each other.

There are times when the Gamemaster may wish to create specific non-powered characters. Here are some guidelines for how to handle that.



## Points

These characters can be constructed with points, just like player characters. However, they usually have zero points to work with. You can extend them more points at your discretion, up to 30.

These points, however, cannot be spent as freely as they can be with a player character.

## Attributes

Most citizens of Nexopolis are, by definition, average. As such, they are of Average Rank in every attribute. Some notable people are of Superior Rank in a key attribute or two. A rare gifted individual might be of Paragon Rank in a single attribute. Even fewer are ranked in any attribute.

In any case, they do not get bonus points for lowering their rank to Average, since they're presumed to start out at that level.

## Powers

Regular citizens normally have no powers of any kind, although there can be exceptions. Such people are usually considered wizards, shamans, priests, and so on, and they hold prominent positions in their worlds. These people may have the following powers:

- Cantrips
- Invocation
- Sorcery

## Creatures and Artifacts

Again, few people have access to creatures and artifacts. Those that do, often either find them in the course of their lives, inherit them, or are given them. When a person has such items, they often become targets by those with power, or even their fellow regular citizens.

## Domains

One who is not a powerful entity like a Gossamer Lord cannot have a Domain. That doesn't mean that they cannot become kings or emperors. However, they cannot develop the kind of influence that Gossamer Lords have over their Domains.

## Allies

Many people have numerous allies. They often cultivate such help explicitly because regular people

have few other options. They can spend Points on allies of any kind.

## Adventure Hooks

There's clearly potential for dozens of different kinds of adventures in Nexopolis. Here are several suggestions to get you started.

### Sea Monster Attack

The mutant giant squid that attacked Trik and his fiancée has returned, and it seems more determined than ever. It turns out that the creature is actually Trik's fiancée, who was magically transformed into a similar creature to provide the original monster with companionship. She has since escaped from her captor and is trying to get the attention of someone—anyone!—with the power to restore her former shape.

### A Little Revolution

Horattio has stumbled across a plot amongst Raven Legionnaires to overthrow Finnian and take control of the island. He doesn't want to involve the authorities, so he calls in the heroes to help figure out what's really going on. That way, if it all goes wrong, they can take the blame.

Horattio doesn't want anyone else to take over Nexopolis. He's been plotting his own attempt for too long. But he'd be happy to co-opt another movement if he felt like he could take it over from within.

### Murder on the Beach

The body of a Dendaros appears in the middle of a wild party at the Long Bar. Since he was psychically disguised before his death, no one knows for sure who he was—or is willing to admit to it, at least. A note implies that it was a hate crime perpetrated against a random Dendaros. Is this the start of a serious rift between Nexopolis and the Agora, or is the killer just trying to cover their tracks?

### Sabotage

Someone is destroying Doors belonging to the most prosperous merchants in the Free-Trade Zone. The Office of Business Development calls in the heroes to help. Since Finnian can remake the Doors, it's not a disaster so much as a time-sucking nuisance, but they want to put an end to it.

## Special Delivery

The Doormen need help getting a package to one of their knights stationed at a distant part of the

Grand Stair. They hire the heroes to bring it there. In fact, the package is worthless, and this is a ploy to draw out a gang of thieves that have targeted the Doormen lately.



*Welcome to Nexopolis. Please...Have a seat.*



# Welcome to Nexopolis!

## Now go home!

Nexopolis sits on an island in the middle of a vast ocean, far from the sight of any distant shores. Here the weather is always perfect, except for when there is a hurricane. Here nearly everyone comes from somewhere else, except for Finnian who runs but does not rule Nexopolis. Here you will find an open crossroads of worlds, except for those Doors that require Keys. Here you will find a Justicar, but not much justice, except for that dealt out by private security teams and the Vigilance Committee. Here you will find both sophisticated magic and high technology, except that purchasing such might cost you more than money. Here a few reckless fools will try to explore the rest of the world, except that the Dwimmerlaik destroyed this world and the lands beyond Nexopolis are not ready for them yet.

*Gossamer Worlds: Nexopolis* by Matt Forbeck is a 50 page supplement, available as both a Full-Color Print and PDF document, for *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow* by Jason Durall, powered by Erick Wujcik's Diceless Roleplaying.

Matt Forbeck has been a full-time creator of award-winning games and fiction since 1989, designing games and toys and writing stories of all sorts. He has twenty-three novels published to date, including the award-nominated *Guild Wars: Ghosts of Ascalon* and the critically acclaimed *Amortals* and *Vegas Knights*. His latest work includes the *Magic: The Gathering* comic book, the MMOs *Marvel Heroes* and *Ghost Recon Online*, and his novel *The Con Job*, based on the TV show *Leverage*.



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