

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

# Gossamer Worlds: Ossuary Empire



by Matt Banach





Rite Publishing Presents:

# Gossamer Worlds: Ossuary Empire

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**Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall**

## Ossuary Empire

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

### Description

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

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

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

so doing slaughtered each other to the very last.

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

Then somebody nuked 'em.

We don't know who detonated the neutron bomb, or who smuggled it in, or which Gossamer World it came from. It

might've been one of the *dîv* resolving to end the war via fratricide-suicide, one of their foolhardy lieutenants grasping for an ace in the hole, or perhaps a cadre of mortals saw their best chance for freedom and took it. The point is, the *dîv* are dead – every last one.

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

*Dîvnbone* has many properties that make it supremely useful and infinitely



valuable. Steeped in the static perfection of the Eidolon, *dîvnbone* artifacts resist change, remaining unsusceptible to “editing” by the Eidolon and immune to the corruption of the Umbra.

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

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

To say that *dîvnbone* is sought-after in the Ossuary Empire is a woeful

## *Dîvnbone Artifacts*

*Dîvnbone* artifacts have the following qualities:

- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points] (Enables use of magical Powers within the Ossuary Empire when ritually appeased; drains and absorbs magical energy)
- Capable of Hanging a Spell [1 Point]  
-and-
- Deadly Damage [4 Points] (if a weapon)  
-or-
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points] (if shield or armor)

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

The Ossuary Empire runs on classical and medieval technology – aqueducts and alchemy, wagons and windmills – but aberrantly advanced gizmos pop up here and there. The War of Deicide ended with the Blinding Sunset a hundred years ago, ceasing the haphazard importation of extra-dimensional weaponry via the Grand Stair. Most items have long since crumbled into useless disrepair, but the

more durable goods persist, reminding us that this is a reality forever tainted by overexposure to the worlds beyond – tribal warriors brandish weathered rifles, palace guards cling to extant suits of bio-armor, and the Diamond Padishah makes a regular show of touring his empire in an immaculately-maintained post-fusion ornithopter. While widely acknowledged as expedient by the militant elite, the continued use of these foreign devices is taboo to most Astudani, who (rightly) blame these alien influences for the eradication of their gods and the ruination of their world.

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



*Diamond Padisha*

## Typical Denizens

Humans populate the Ossuary Empire in the typical vast variety, running the gamut from simple nomadic herdsman and common street-beggars to extravagant sultans and worldly merchant-kings. Now, I'll be honest, the last time I visited this realm my focus was less on demographics and more on not getting shivved in the neck with a pointy deific metacarpal, so please forgive my coarse understanding of these fine people.

The “city folk” of *Sahr Astudan* congregate in the remaining great urban centers, drawn to the rekindled fires of the grand bazaars which maintain the hope that civilization in this punished land is not lost. Trading goods out in the bandit-riddled countryside is dangerous, so farmers and craftsmen depend on

these sprawling marketplaces (packed with guards and thief-takers) to vend their goods – everything from goats-meat kabobs to war-elephants, and even hand-made bullets for strange guns that aren't even supposed to exist in this world. The bazaars are noisy, smelly, and chaotic, not to mention lousy with beggars, pickpockets, and cut-purses, but there's no better symbol of the vibrancy and tenacity of human existence. At least, I thought so the last time I had to chase a street urchin across the rooftops to retrieve my pilfered sidearm.

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

## Threats

The Diamond Padishah rules the Ossuary Empire from the ancient throne-city of Parsa, commanding the obedience

and loyalty of millions of citizens spread across thousands of leagues of the remaining civilized world. The story goes that he began as a minor noble and alchemist but was the first to snatch up *divnbone* in large quantities, gaining a staggering advantage in power before the rest of the world caught on.

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

He's not terrible, as far as super-powered dictators go, considering that he *has* brought civilization back from the brink of total collapse; but he's shrewd, suspicious, and dangerously unforgiving when it comes to anything threatening his grasp on power. If you must deal with him, bring a gift, and make it good.

The hashashin – yup, the legendary league of assassins – were deeply enriched by the War of Deicide, gaining vast wealth in blood money while simultaneously augmenting their ancient killing arts with equipment and techniques brought in from strange worlds beyond the Grand Stair. Hundreds of extra-dimensional assassins





### *Shah-ghul the Emperor Worm*

joined ranks with the local hashashin over the wartime years as a cover for their activities, and dozens of these hardened killers remain on-world to this day. *These are the people you really have to watch out for.* The secret masters of Alamut have an arrangement-of-sorts with the Diamond Padishah, their best customer: the Padishah hires assassins to kill rival wielders of *dīvnbone* and harvest their stuff; the assassins do so, skimming *dīvnbone* relics from each haul in addition to their steep fees; and both parties smile and pretend they don't know what the other is doing. This arrangement is expedient at the present, until the inevitable day when it isn't.

The Nephilim proclaim themselves the 'children of the gods', though it isn't true; if anything, they were pets. When the *dīv* perished, these monsters slipped their ancient bonds and gnawed at the corpses of their former masters, seizing the power they'd always coveted. Nephilim aren't just users of *dīvnbone*, they've bonded themselves with it, fusing themselves with *dīv* skeletons or parts thereof in gruesome but powerful amalgamations. There's Shah-ghul the Emperor Worm, an enormous serpentine larva grafted into an entire spinal column; Gug the Horned, a giant who fancies itself some sort of genie; and 'the Child', a bobble-headed psychic phenom



### *Gog The Horned*

who's grown its dangerous brain to fill a *dīv* skull twice its size. The Nephilim are disorganized and usually pursue their own monstrous agendas, but they all blame extradimensional “poison” for the destruction of their beloved masters and harbor a deep hatred for off-worlders. Aware of the existence of the Grand Stair but unable to venture out upon it, several Nephilim guard the known Doors to the

Ossuary Empire with the goal of keeping outsiders out and every precious fragment of *dīvnbone* in.

*Setare* is an ultra-potent cocktail of exotic drugs and pulverized *dīvnbone* which grants those who ingest it freakish psychic powers, disturbing messianic psychoses, and glowing white eyes that glitter like stars. I might've seen such a



*Parsa*

thing, once upon a moonlit desert night, but the nice big truck that hit me suggested I'd be better off forgetting the whole incident, and I'm inclined to agree.

### *Notable Locations*

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

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

Alamut Castle has been the mountain fortress of the hashashin for a thousand years and remains the most closely guarded and staggeringly deadly enclave in this entire world. The assassins' headquarters is full of zealous initiates,

hardened killers, wizened masters, and more than a few thinly veiled aliens. Off-world technology abounds there, as the death-dealers supplement their training in the usual knife-work and poisoning with grenades and sniper rifles. While the secret masters of the hashashin once enjoyed the convenience of a Door occurring within the confines of their keep, a recent Gossamer Lord-related debacle severed said connection, and they're looking for someone to blame.

The Sea of Black Glass is a wasteland, all that remains of the great eastern desert after the neutron bomb of the Blinding Sunset irradiated every oasis and baked the sands into a mirror of cracked obsidian. It looks desolate, but it isn't. The desert striders step lightly

across its shattered surface, searching for fragments of the last two *dîv* as they chase a prophecy which portends the ascension – and transformation – of all mankind.

### Final Thoughts

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

~ *Yaeger Zane*

### Ossuary Empire Domain Table

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