

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: Stratospheria



by Matt Banach





Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Stratospheria

Explorer (Author): Matt Banach

Seeker (Editor): Steven D. Russell

Searcher (Cover Artist): Adrian Mark Gillespie

Trailblazer (Interior Artist): Adrian Mark Gillespie

Pioneer (Trade Dress): James “Devin Knight” Hazelett

Lost Boy (Layout and Publisher): Steven D. Russell

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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Stratospheria

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

Description

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

staggeringly destructive entropic forces set to blow everything apart.

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

Advanced technology (strongly influenced by the Eidolon) is essential to keeping Stratospheria afloat. Anti-gravitational field generators are an essential component of Aerion Prime's trademark ultra-light airships, comprise the foundations of the habitable zone's floating cities, and provide humanoid species some reprieve from the massive planet's punishing gravity. In a world without ground, everything must be plucked from the air; harvester ships do the dangerous work of gathering heavier elements from the clouds themselves, filtering millions of cubic meters of



The Raft

atmosphere just to cobble together the equivalent of a few handfuls of dirt – and then zipping away before a stray storm rips them to shreds. Solar energy arrays provide for the basic electrical needs of most technology above the clouds, but anti-gravitational field generators and most airship propulsion engines rely on fusion reactors fueled by deuterium harvested from the lower atmosphere.

Stratospherian civilization acquires some of its solid materials from off-planet, though the days of reliable resupply from space are a swiftly-fading memory. Fifty years ago, the forces of the Umbra scored a devastating victory by influencing two of Aerion Prime's largest moons to wobble in their orbits to such a



degree that the two celestial bodies collided, fracturing into a vast asteroid belt which now clogs local space with deadly debris. A few expert pilots make supply runs to Aerion Prime in exchange for a hefty mark-up, and the galactic trading federation still sends rare envoys, but the rest of space-faring civilization beyond Aerion Prime's solar system has pretty much forsaken the Aerion system as a backwater wasteland.

Typical Denizens

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

Humans on Stratospheria are mostly the descendants of colonists which first came to Aerion Prime a few hundred

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

The raptori are humanoid aliens with distant avian ancestry, perfectly at home in the air even though their species hasn't flown on natural wings for millennia. Raptori have pale, nearly translucent skin, feathery white hair, and wide eyes typically colored violet, pink, or red. Extremely slim of frame to the point of appearing emaciated by human standards, their twig-like limbs sport wiry muscles laced over steel-strong hollow bones, and the short talon-like nails at the ends of their fingertips are wickedly sharp. Most raptori present on Aerion Prime came for work; their atmospheric scientists are beyond



Raptori Skyrig

brilliant, and raptori pilots are some of the best in the business, known for their lightning-fast reflexes and keen navigational sense. While beautiful and highly skilled, raptori tend to be pessimistic and pragmatic to the point of cruelty, keeping only the company of those they deem competent and quick to leave a fool to die.

Jinn are ghostly, cloud-like aliens made up of sentient superclusters of nanorobots suspended in energized gas and held together by a person-sized force field. You know, regular guys. Whatever they used to be, the jinn long ago gave up corporeal form and uploaded their consciousnesses into these nanite-clouds, which are self-repairing and nearly

immortal. Those few jinn who associate with human civilization remain strange and aloof, often communicating in riddles, rhymes, or cryptic supposedly-prophetic nonsense spoken in their creepy, robotic voices. While jinn can and do hover and even fly under calm conditions, they are loathe to roam the skies unprotected due to the threat of being blown apart by a strong wind, which is one of the few harms which could genuinely kill a jinn (or at least scatter one for a decade or two). The jinn's true reason for being on Stratospheria at all is mysterious – many believe they're waiting, watching, and searching for something hidden within the clouds.

Threats

Super-storms constantly roil across the surface of Aerion Prime, replete with lightning, acid rain, and several-hundred-knot winds that routinely obliterate any permanent structures with the ill luck to be caught below the upper atmosphere for any length of time. While they remain entirely natural phenomena, these storms undoubtedly further the entropic interests of the Umbra through their churning chaos and unrelenting destruction.

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

“Cloud giants” resemble enormous floating blue-green jellyfish, but they're actually massive hybrid colonies of lighter-than-air microorganisms and photosynthetic cyanobacteria clumped together in big creepy symbiotic blobs. Each one has millions of long, wispy tentacles which can defend the colony by lashing, constricting, or stinging threats

with bioelectrical discharges; and, when thoroughly agitated, a cloud giant can emit an electromagnetic pulse strong enough to cripple nearby airships. Cloud giants are beings of the Eidolon, thought to be the remnants of a failed (or at least stalled) attempt to terraform Aerion Prime despite impossible odds, producing oxygen through their photosynthesis and serving as floating forests in a landless realm. Even though they're supposedly mindless, cloud giants have been sighted congregating *en masse*, glowing like a fleet of hot-air balloons as they sing their keening, whale-like songs in eerie chorus.

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

Notable locations

Zephyr's Landing is an immense floating city considered the *de facto* capital of Stratospheria. By far the largest



Zephyr's Landing

single structure on Aerion Prime, the city houses just over a million souls and supports hundreds of industrial concerns, including hydroponic farms, rare element refineries, airship manufacturing, and one of the planet's few places where inbound spacecraft can dock. The city is a vital economic hub, either producing or serving as a point-of-sale for most physical goods traded in Stratospheria. While the city is overseen by a chief administrator acting with the support of an elected executive committee, practically Zephyr's Landing is an oligarchy run by powerful merchant-industrialists – all of whom compete for resources and profits, but remain united by the common imperative of cooperation for the sake of survival.

Survival means keeping things orderly and efficient, so violence of any sort is harshly condemned and any feuding parties unable to settle their differences peacefully (or at least quietly) are sternly encouraged to “take it outside”. The Door to Stratospheria opens out of a closet (containing pressure suits) into one of the city's many airlocks; once through the Door, the hatch to the right leads inside to an airship maintenance bay, and the hatch to the left leads outside to the open atmosphere and a thousand-mile drop.

The Raft is a wandering pirate city – a sprawling patchwork of lashed-together platforms, drastically modified airships, and any unrecognizable piece of scrap its inhabitants could weld to an anti-



Skymax-616

gravitational field generator. Home to thousands of sky pirates, the Raft is a rare island of camaraderie and respite for those with – literally – nowhere else to land. Roaming the skies just one step ahead of the storms and the law, the Raft's pirates maneuver their motley base within striking distance of ripe targets, launch their raiding ships, then drift away again into the infinite sea of clouds clutching their spoils. Might makes right on the Raft, and whomever declares themselves “pirate king” on any particular day had better have the moxy and the manpower to back the claim. Presently, that dubious honor belongs to Supreme Captain Ryk Falco, a sinister scoundrel with more greed than honor, only a shade more humane than the bloodthirsty cannibal he replaced. The coordinates of the Raft at any given moment is a closely guarded pirate secret, though their greatest deception is that there isn't just one – lesser gatherings of pirate ships also tout themselves to be “the Raft”, sowing

disinformation across Stratospheria and lending credence to the city's ominous and mysterious reputation.

SkyMax-616 is a maximum-security penitentiary, the last of a dying breed of mid-air prisons once popular with policy-makers of the galactic trading federation. Supremely well-funded and constructed with state-of-the-art technology, the facility was built to house inmates too dangerous (or valuable) to keep anywhere else. Run entirely by an artificial intelligence warden-system, the place is sterile, self-sufficient, and secure, defended by android guards and arrays of laser-turrets programmed to eradicate any solid object that comes within a kilometer of the prison without the proper clearance codes. Ultra-dangerous convicts are kept in deep cryogenic sleep, so the place is hauntingly quiet, however a few cells do house warm bodies there for other reasons, including one exiled emperor, a dozen or more VIP clones, and pair of twin children rumored to be

the second coming of something the powers-that-be would prefer not come again. A friend of mine on the inside, a lifer named Ophelia Blue, has hacked herself enough loopholes and permissions in the system that she can move about the facility freely, so long as she never leaves. If you bring her a crate of red wine and a few hours of decent conversation, you'll earn a friend for life; and, if you see her, tell her Inmate Z7301 made it through that door.

Final Thoughts

Stratospheria is a realm of contradictions, showcasing the terrible

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

Stratospheria Domain Table

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

