

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: The Nightmare Kingdom



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by Matt Banach





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Gossamer Worlds: The Nightmare Kingdom

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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The Nightmare Kingdom

“The dirty concrete landing was a gloom of shadows – the nearest two lightbulbs in the industrial-looking stairwell were busted out and dark, even though that’s not supposed to happen on the Grand Stair. Something crunched beneath my feet, but it wasn’t glass, and I wasn’t going to look down. A single bloody hand-print smeared the wall beside the Door, which was covered in chipped black paint... and stood wide open. On the other side of the threshold, dense grey mist swirled, revealing a pair of glowing red eyes. I heard my name being called, faintly, buried somewhere under all that screaming.” - Travelogue

Description

The Nightmare Kingdom is a living, breathing, waking world of nightmares made manifest in a soul-crushing hellscape dedicated to the provocation, cultivation, and consumption of terror.

And, *no*, I’m not being melodramatic.

First, a bit of conceptual framework: we have always known that the concept of “reality” as applies to the gossamer worlds is... *variable*, to say the least. Most of us, even high and mighty Gossamer Lords, come to rely upon certain principles: time moves in one direction, mortal lives begin and end,

and matter and energy transmute in form but tend not to be created or destroyed. Hence, it is unsettling to experience a world where the laws of reality are so loose that even these most basic precepts do not apply. Aside from being terribly dangerous, this staggering lack of structure calls into question the very nature of existence, with all the philosophical baggage *that* entails. So, with that shaky foundation in mind, imagine a world where the difference between thought and reality disappears almost entirely – a place where the arrangement of matter, energy, and space-time occurs not according to scientific law but instead by psychic whim. Furthermore, imagine such a world in which fear is the dominant form of psychic energy, more powerful than atomic fission and more pervasive than sunlight, with the very fabric of the realm contracting, expanding, and twisting according to the ebb and flow of terror. Finally, imagining a world with all those lovely qualities, picture it running wild since the dawn of time, stalking the vast gulf of Shadow-space in a never-ending hunt for fear.

Some make the fatal mistake of thinking the Nightmare Kingdom is “just a dream”, but it surely isn’t; the monsters and threats of the Kingdom are very real, and no amount of waking up can cure its harms.

Ancient, powerful, and ever changing, the Nightmare Kingdom the content of the fears it consumes drives it. Oftentimes this interaction causes the



realm to mimic the appearance of other gossamer worlds down to the smallest detail, either in reflexive response to the fears of its victims, or at the direction of the Kingdom's ruler. Hence, the Kingdom has gone by countless names over the eons, constantly misidentified as a myriad of different worlds. I've heard accounts of the Kingdom guising itself as thousands of different iterations of Earth, as a false version of Shatterlight, as an endless void of infinite vacant space, and even condensing down in its entirety to become a perfect replica of That-Dark-Closet-Where-Those-Bad-Things-Happened. Historically there are recognizable patterns in the Kingdom's

appearance according to the personality and designs of its ruler, but it is important to remember that it *could* appear to be anywhere. You could be sitting in it right now.

Another disturbing quality of the Nightmare Kingdom is – it wanders. I'll elaborate by way of metaphor: if the vast nothingness of Shadow is a darkened street, and the gossamer worlds are individual houses on that street, all connected by the paved walkways of the Grand Stair, the Nightmare Kingdom is the insane homicidal drifter skulking through backyards and trying latches. Doors to the Nightmare Kingdom appear and disappear aggressively,

commonly appearing in dreadful places and/or near someone experiencing acute fear. The Nightmare Kingdom often lures victims through the Door, or sometimes the Kingdom's frightful boogeymen just pop out for a moment to say 'boo'. The Kingdom has an affinity for bedroom closets, by the way. My own theory regarding this is profoundly heretical: I think the Kingdom is unmoored from any stationary point in the vast gulf of Shadow and thereby has the ability to connect itself directly to other gossamer worlds without crossing the Grand Stair. Other Gossamer Lords assure me I'm wrong, that there must be some other explanation – perhaps the Kingdom has found a niche on the Stair where the hallway between Doors is measured in inches instead of yards, or it is some twisting of the Veil which gives the illusion of a direct connection. Perhaps... but I know what I saw.

Despite its mercurial nature, it is possible to claim the Nightmare Kingdom as a Domain. Those who have done so in the past were predominantly power-mad Umbra Masters, walking nightmares in their own right: Morpheus, Ikelos, Lady Phrike, The Dark Man, Morgana, Papa Midnight, one of the elder Dwimmerlaik, that guy with nails in his head... the list goes on. They were and are the stuff of legends, boogeymen of the highest order, though the only thing more unsettling than their tenures as overlords of terror is the fact that those tenures ended. While ruling the Nightmare Kingdom provides an unprecedented forum for the indulgence

of sadistic fantasy, wielding such unbridled power is terribly taxing, even on the most jaded psyches. As such, while some rulers hold power for millennia – and some for mere days – sovereignty over the Nightmare Kingdom invariably ends in ruin. Personally, I believe the Kingdom has a personality of its own and from time to time will reject its mortal steersman, terminating the relationship in favor of fresh management; maybe the Kingdom grows bored, maybe the ruler doesn't feed it enough... or maybe the most delicious fear of all is the fear of a king.

The Ghoul

The current master of the Nightmare Kingdom is a gruesome creature known only as “the Ghoul”. Like many Umbra Masters, the Ghoul can assume many different physical incarnations. But, his/her/its most recent appearances have been as either a tall male umbral gaunt-like cyclops, a pallid teenage girl concealed by a tangle of long black hair, or a more monstrous form which I've only heard described as “like an androgynous dog-person in a latex gimp suit, but made of maggots.” Judging by the tableaux of terror the Ghoul commonly concocts, I believe it to be very familiar with 20th century America – though whether it originated from that historical period on a specific gossamer Earth, I do not know. If it was ever human, or anything close to human, those days are long gone.

Fully melded with the Nightmare Kingdom, the Ghoul has mastered the very pliable gossamer fabric of the Domain and uses this god-like power to shape and warp reality in a violent orgy of phantasmagorical tableaux, expertly focused on cultivating anxiety, terror, and despair. In other, smaller, words: it really loves scaring the shit out of people, using the most powerful special effects engine in the entire multiverse. While inside the Kingdom, the Ghoul is effectively omniscient and omnipresent, appearing or disappearing at will, though it prefers to act through agents and totems instead of appearing directly.

For all its power and sadistic indulgence, the Ghoul may not be as 'in control' as the maniacal laughter might lead us to believe. During the last decade, there have been increased sightings of the Ghoul venturing away from the Nightmare Kingdom, lurking in darkened corners of the Grand Stair and paying unwelcome visits to other gossamer worlds. While these excursions could simply be hunting behavior, I have heard several reports that the Ghoul seemed surprisingly reluctant to return home. My own theory is that the Ghoul is secretly looking for a successor, either willing or unwilling.



Master of Terror, Slave to Fear

The Nightmare Kingdom is much more of a curse than an asset, and “ownership” of that terrible place should shake even the strongest characters to their core, as absolute power corrupts absolutely. Any character who claims the Nightmare Kingdom as a Domain automatically begins drawing mystical sustenance from the fears of others, whether they wish to or not, and it is impossible to taste that dark power without becoming addicted. This process can be slow and insidious, or swift and shocking, but should be inevitable.

The Nightmare Kingdom can claim a character as its owner against that character's will, at the dramatic discretion of the gamemaster, even if that character does not have a sufficient reserve of advancement points immediately available to purchase the Kingdom as a Domain – *they'll pay later, oh yes they will*. Such a drastic personal invasion might come after a courting period where the Kingdom victimizes and corrupts the character, breaking down their willpower and acclimating them to the realm's twisted, terror-sucking reality. This event could transform the character into a major villain, and/or begin an epic struggle as the other characters struggle to save their wayward ally from a fate worse than death.

Typical Denizens

The Nightmare Kingdom is full of people and personalities, most of who fall into one of two categories: predators and prey. The earnest county sheriff who warns you to forget those lights in the trees, the plucky group of high-schoolers gone out camping on a spooky summer night, or the creepy old fortune teller who keeps muttering about doom, they all share space with vampires, ghosts, and stranger boogeymen who sow and reap fear on behalf of the realm. While the Kingdom and its ruler vastly prefer the taste and potency of fresh fear from other realms and visiting victims therefrom, the ebb and flow of recycled dread amongst the Kingdom's native inhabitants seems to function like some form of profane metaphysical circulatory and digestion system. Hence, the nefarious powers-that-be do seem to have an interest in willing a population into being and terrorizing them, even without an outside audience. I pity those poor folks, and hope for their sake they do not remember their torments from life to life.

It would be wrong to categorize the inhabitants of the Nightmare Kingdom as mere phantasms; they're not. Every man, woman, child, dog, monster, and specter that exists there truly does exist within the confines of that gossamer reality, albeit sometimes for only brief periods dictated by the cruel whims of the realm and its ruler. Existence in the Nightmare Kingdom is a terrible,



The Ghoul

fleeting thing – the Ghoul's complete control of the Kingdom's makeup and time flow allows it to effectively turn back time, recreating the world to perfectly mimic scenes from “the past”, or simply looping events in perfect repetition, trapping residents in a never-ending cycle. These temporal illusions don't alter the internal chronology of non-native victims, however, so while the local denizens may seem jog up and down the time stream, reliving their terrible lives over and over, visitors can't actually undo their own pasts. That said, most denizens of the Nightmare Realm are hapless mortals who serve as both audience and backdrop to the realm's regular pageants of horror.



Boogeymen

Threats

Boogeymen is a catch-all term for the terrorizing predatory monsters of the Nightmare Kingdom. They come in many forms: vampires, werewolves, ghosts, zombies, serial killers, obsessed psychopaths, vicious wild animals... pretty much any frightening creature imaginable, though the Ghoul tends to prefer the Hollywood classics. Boogeymen are the grim workforce of the Kingdom, tasked with inflicting anguish and sowing terror amongst the prey population and any outsider victims who wander in. When empowered by the Ghoul, boogeymen can even pierce the Veil and venture onto the Grand Stair or into other gossamer worlds for very brief

excursions, usually no further than the immediate threshold of a Door. Most boogeymen are no true match a Gossamer Lord once you get past their theatrics, though even the least of them are aggressive, persistent, and increasingly dangerous in greater numbers. Their elite – the master vampire, the risen pharaoh, that unspeakable tentacled behemoth beneath the waves – are true and deadly threats.

The Man With Red Hands is the greatest of the boogeymen and the Ghoul's chief lieutenant. Immortal and incorporeal, this malevolent demonic spirit affects the physical world by possessing the bodies of others. While the spirit is capable of mimicking a

host's reactions and mannerisms, it tends to reveal its presence eventually through its wicked smile – and by coating the host's hands in fresh red blood. This gory motif usually accompanies an act of gut-wrenching violence and/or self-mutilation. Please believe me when I say that there is no greater bastard in all the multiverse than the Man, and should you ever feel the filthy tendrils of his soul seeping into yours, do yourself a favor and put a bullet in your head before its too late.

Notable Locations

Under the stewardship of the Ghoul, the Nightmare Kingdom tends to default to the appearance of some decade within 20th Century America, though more exotic environments and horrific hellscapes readily spawn from seemingly mundane beginnings.

Lomax, Maine is a sleepy little town in the backwoods, perpetually stuck in some doldrum-y gap in the late 1950s. The town has seen better days: folks are depressed, the lumber mill dried up after all those accidents, and the only place in town that draws any tourists, is the bed-and-breakfast up on the hill. It used to be a church, and before that it was a mental hospital, and before that it was the home of the eccentric town founder, whose odd religion is best forgotten. The kids in Lomax know that something's wrong, that there's a reason why their parents don't want them out after dark. The Door to the Nightmare

Running Scared

Fear is power in the Nightmare Kingdom, and adjudicating whether or not a character is 'really scared' enough to be fed upon by the Domain can be subjective, nuanced, and tricky. Here are some options for gamemasters:

Weakest Link – The first time the Nightmare Kingdom or one of its agents tries to frighten the group, assume that the frightening effect or creature is sufficiently scary to frighten the character with the lowest Psyche. This fear feeds the Kingdom, thereby increasing its ability to frighten such that it can scare the character with the next highest Psyche, and so on.

By The Numbers – Scaring a character is a test of Psyche. Assume that the following entities have a Psyche equivalent to the following for purposes of this test: Average Boogeyman, Psyche 10; Elite Boogeyman, Psyche 25; The Man With Red Hands, Psyche 50; The Ghoul, Psyche 100. The gamemaster can always adjust these figures to fit the power level of the game.

The Honor System – Just ask each player whether their character is scared (even if the character chooses to act tough), and trust their answer. Gamemasters always reserve the right to call bullshit.

Kingdom in this incarnation opens out of a supply closet into the humble break room of the Lomax County Sheriff's Department.

Bad Bad NYC is New York City rotting in the most degraded moments of the 1980s. Urban decay has crept over everything like dirty graffiti, crime runs rampant, and entrenched police corruption ensures that nothing is getting better any time soon. By night, the streets buzz with garish neon, the flickers of burnt-out signs illuminate vampires feeding in the alleys and werewolves howling from the rooftops. Serial killers are more popular than celebrities. Grim vigilantes strive to make a difference and bring justice to the streets, but their brief flashes of tarnished heroism only serve to highlight the fact that the world is going to Hell in a hand basket, and that's exactly what it deserves. The Door to the Nightmare Kingdom in this incarnation opens out of a side door into a filthy alleyway just half a block from Times Square.

Tinseltown is Hollywood, California at a height of glitz and glamor in the golden days of the early 1930s. The blockbuster popularity of monster movies such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Mummy* has flooded film studio coffers to overflowing, drawing swarms of aspiring actors, actresses, and screenwriters to the bright lights of the city where dreams come true. With everything going so well, folks try not to notice when young starlets go missing, or when strange occurrences up in the hills get blamed on wayward special



effects. The Door to the Nightmare Kingdom in this incarnation opens into the dressing room of some A-list starlet at Universal Studios. If you don't mind getting slapped, tell her Johnny Zee says hi.

Final Thoughts

The Nightmare Kingdom is dangerous, powerful, and eternal. No matter how many times we seal it off, or wipe it from the maps, or defeat its unspeakably depraved figurehead, it will return. So the best strategy is to learn to recognize the telltale dread of its illusions, steel your mind against the terrors that await, and run the other way.

~ Yaeger Zane

The Nightmare Kingdom Domain Table

Technology Level:	Other (varies depending on apparent time period)
Magic Level:	Known and Believed
Security:	Guarded [4 Points] (the monsters of nightmare)
Type:	Primal World [4 Points]
Control:	Control of Destiny [4 Points] (current owner: The Ghoul)
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Weak Umbra – Powerful Wrighting – Blocked
Special:	<i>Terror Incarnate.</i> The owner of the Nightmare Kingdom feeds upon the fear of visitors to the Kingdom, as well as fear experienced in close proximity to (within a few yards of) any Door which leads thereto. The owner may use this psychic sustenance to heal wounds, fuel Powers, bolster Attributes, or divert the fear back into the Nightmare Kingdom itself, shaping the realm and its denizens to suit the victim's darkest fears.

