

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: Verse Arcanum



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by Matt Banach



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Gossamer Worlds: Verse Arcanum

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

Verse Arcanum

“Atop the winding tower of the stairwell, the ascension of dirty concrete steps terminated in a landing that positively thrummed with undefined yet undeniable power. To the left, a hallway led elsewhere into darkness; to the right, a single Door, painted white, gleamed beautifully from the shadows. The plain rectangular portal swung open, releasing a plume of shimmering purple smoke accompanied by a cacophony of cascading thunder and dragon-screams. The wizards were fighting again.” - Yaeger's Travelogue

Description

The Verse Arcanum is an entire gossamer universe brimming over with magical energy – a fantastic realm of giants and dragons, fell prophecy and faerie fire. Also known reverently as the Realm of Towers, jokingly as Wizard World, or simply as “the Verse”, the realm's abundance of mystical power makes it a natural laboratory, playground, and battleground for practitioners of Sorcery and other arcane arts. The existence of the Verse Arcanum is widely known throughout the Grand Stair, and it has long been a popular haunt and common ground for Gossamer Lords and other, older, eldritch forces.

While typically such a desirable resource-rich territory would produce inevitable and acrimonious conflict between covetous claimants, the Verse

Arcanum has the rare quality of being claimed by many but monopolized by none. Whereas most gossamer realities can be “owned” as a Domain by only one Gossamer Lord at a time, in the Verse Arcanum the dominance of a Gossamer Lord is a localized effect centered around a single focal point – a Tower. It is impossible to hold more than one Tower at a time (though folks *have* tried), but attempts at building multiple Towers produce only mundane structures, and seizing the Tower of another Lord requires relinquishing one's previous holding lest both crumble to ruin.

All Towers are tall, narrow, impressive structures, but each one is as unique as its owner and Gossamer Lords love to bend the rules. I've seen creative floor plans including an entirely underground stack of sub-basements a mile deep, a towering cascade of frozen waterfalls, and somewhere out there in Verse Arcanum space there's a crystalline shard the size of a moon orbiting a self-aware psychic star. Towers typically contain the owner's opulent living quarters, a well-equipped laboratory, a library or twelve, and the insane kinds of death traps and security measures your average paranoid world-hopping demigod might conjure up for their inner sanctum when left alone with a blank slate and an unlimited budget for sorcery. My own glorious Tower has a zero-gravity solarium, a protective perimeter of buxom succubi-gargoyles, and a winged unicorn paddock in the back forty. And, yes, since you asked nicely, when you visit you *may* ride one.



Each Tower is surrounded by a roughly circular region of aligned territory called the *demesne*. Demesnes vary in size according to the power of each owner, though few extend more than a league from the base of their respective Tower; as such, since there's an entire universe out there to occupy, demesnes rarely abut each other unless a newcomer makes the foolhardy decision to stake a claim right on someone else's lawn. The gossamer reality of the demesne surrounding each Tower alters to suit the owner, whether crafted deliberately or influenced unconsciously – nearby inhabitants conform to the expectations of the local Lord, the environment shifts according to their mood, and even the laws of physics can warp if the Lord gets riled up. While anything goes inside a Lord's Tower, the ability to shape gossamer reality within the demesne is not completely *carte blanche* – the Verse Arcanum is a realm of magic, not technology, and nothing requiring gunpowder or electricity is likely to work or last outside of a Tower.

The “wild” territory in between demesnes, capable of being traveled, enjoyed, and utilized by any Gossamer Lord, defaults to the natural fantastical terrain – enchanted forests, haunted hills, mountains of doom and whatnot – ruled and occupied by the realm's indigenous inhabitants. Magic infuses every aspect of the environment, from the flora and fauna to the sky and beyond; speaking stones and enchanted woods are everywhere, overseen by fanciful inhabitants including everything from spritely fey to grumpy dragon-turtles. Two-faced elves stalk the ancient groves and coal-hearted dwarves hammer away beneath the mountains, while in every human village a great hero might soon be born.

Typical Denizens

While many of the peoples of the Verse Arcanum may seem familiar from the fairy tales and ancient legends of a thousand other worlds, it bears mention that nothing here is benign, and even the

lowliest of commoners likely knows someone who knows the way of spell and curse, making even the most mundane of encounters potentially dire, or downright deadly.

Humans thrive in the Verse Arcanum, seeded across the myriad worlds in varied races and cultures, though when it comes to power and opportunity they tend to be a mixed bag of haves and have-nots. In some kingdoms, squalid medieval villages cower in the shadow of mages' towers, full of superstitious peasants desperate to be spared their master's power-mad wrath, the predations of nearby monsters, or both. Elsewhere, great cities of men shine atop impossible peaks or gather around enchanted desert oases, packed with city folk who lust for magical treasure and covet the concentrated mystical wealth of local heroes. When it comes to humans, fate and genetics are better indicators of magical aptitude than culture or training; child prodigies spring up all the time, often according to some prophecy or another, and often in a traumatic, life-altering eruption of power. Nevertheless, those who don't have mojo crave it all the same, and human-run schools of wizardry are never lacking in students aspiring to be the next chosen one.

Elves in the Verse Arcanum are eerie, inscrutable creatures following a dualistic philosophy that serves both the Eidolon and the Umbra. It's strange – in a way, *all* elves here are “light elves” and “dark elves” at the same time, though the expression of this dualism varies from tribe to tribe. Elves may build an orderly city of idyllic perfection and tend its



pristine gardens for a hundred years, only to celebrate its centennial by razing it to the ground in a fortnight of depravity, destruction, and death. Some elves are truly two-faced, sporting two-toned skin, or wearing moon-themed ritual masks designating which eternal force they're serving at a given moment. I once met a tribe of elves, which I thought lawful and civilized, only to learn that the twisted, ravenous freaks who prowled their borders were the tribal elders who had passed on into the umbral stage of their lives... in proper traditional fashion. Elves worship nature in cyclical aspects such as the lunar phases, the tides, or the life-and-death churn of the seasons, and while I can respect the yin-and-yang cosmic balance of their philosophy, watching it in action is unsettling. The

other races in the Verse Arcanum typically shun and distrust these alien, unpredictable elves, and I don't blame them. Elven magic is primal and crazy powerful, spun directly from the friction between Eidolon and Umbra; elven spells are notoriously difficult to dispel or deflect, and elven coven-curses are as certain a doom as ever there was.

Dwarves are prolific in the Verse Arcanum, divided into a multitude of related races and sub-species such as gnomes, munchkins, stonelings, and half-folk (though don't ever let on that I've lumped them all together, that'll earn you a pick-axe in the knee). Staunchly aligned with the Eidolon, dwarves believe in the pursuit of ideal form and constantly strive to reveal the patterns of true perfection in every object they shape; for them, craftsmanship is not merely a work ethic, but a religious calling. The quality of dwarven arms and armor is beyond compare, as their techniques weave matter and magic to produce qualities of sharpness, hardness, and durability surpassing anything made by so-called "technology" on other gossamer worlds. My own beloved golden spear is dwarf-forged, and I solemnly believe that the Grand Stair will crumble into dust before that thing goes dull. Dwarven creativity ranges far beyond weaponry – stoneling architecture makes the impossible practical; gnomish ships traverse sea, sky, and space effortlessly; and munchkin cooking is so divine the little darlings can cure blood-curses with a bowl of snapdragon soup. Not all dwarves create in celebration of the Eidolon – some destroy in service to the



Umbra. In the lightless underworld, the null-forges of the *dvergrs* can unmake anything... artifacts, souls, even immortals.

Dozens of other races populate the Verse Arcanum's various kingdoms and sub-realms, either in concentrated enclaves or scattered throughout. Animal-folk stalk the wilds, practicing savage blood-magic and guarding their ancestral lands. Giants rule the highest mountain peaks and mist-shrouded hinterlands, longing for the halcyon days of a cyclopean empire long since faded from mortal memory. Fey frolic around hidden toadstool rings or scheme from the shadows to steal babies, trick apprentices, or whatever it is that they do. No matter their size or shape, every being in the Verse Arcanum is defined by their relationship to magic – those who lack it crave it, those who wield it

worship it, and those who master it rule like gods.

Threats

Wizards are everywhere, harnessing the power of magic in hundreds of different ways: sorcery, geomancy, divination, evocation, thaumaturgy, witchcraft... the list goes on. Some are mere dabblers, but more than a few wield sufficient power to stand their ground against one of us in a battle of blasts and counterspells. Of particular concern is the Maegistirium, a conspiracy of powerful archmages who've caught on to the existence of the Grand Stair and resent we Gossamer Lords as extra-dimensional carpetbaggers trashing *their* reality with gaudy towers and reckless displays of power. While hurtful, I'll admit that's not inaccurate, though they're intent on capturing a Gossamer Lord for interrogation and magical vivisection, so I don't think we're all going to be friends.

Spell-Eaters are malevolent spirits which, you guessed it, eat spells. One would think that in a realm overflowing with magical energy, they'd have plenty to nibble, but no, they only go after the finest, most concentrated mystic delicacies – enchanted weapons, objects holding hanging spells, and spellcasters themselves. Spell-Eaters enter and possess the body of a magical practitioner, simultaneously leeching the host body dry (until death) while using



A Different Hocus Pocus

The Verse Arcanum contains hundreds of rich and different magical traditions. Instead of creating new rules for each one, use existing mechanics: Invocation has rules for calling, summoning, compulsion, and binding; Wrighting provides a template for mystic communication, teleportation, and sympathetic magic; and Cantrips and Sorcery spells are written broadly to encompass a myriad of expressions.

the host's power and abilities to hunt and bring down juicy mystic morsels and

further prey. Possession by a spell-eater temporarily augments the inherent abilities of the host, so the spirits have a knack for stair-stepping their way up the sorcerous food chain, up to and including the top. Possession by a spell-eater causes the host's eyes to rot into black pits, so if you see a colleague approaching you with hollow sockets, run.

Heroes are everywhere, and they are *annoying*. At first I thought I'd be sympathetic – they're adventurers, I'm an adventurer; they're gifted little snowflakes, I'm a gifted little snowflake. But there's something about getting smited (smote? smitten?) in the face by a beefy holier-than-thou paladin that really makes me willing to be hypocritically cranky. Keep them away from your Tower, your treasure, and pray they don't fixate upon you as the next Big Bad Evil.

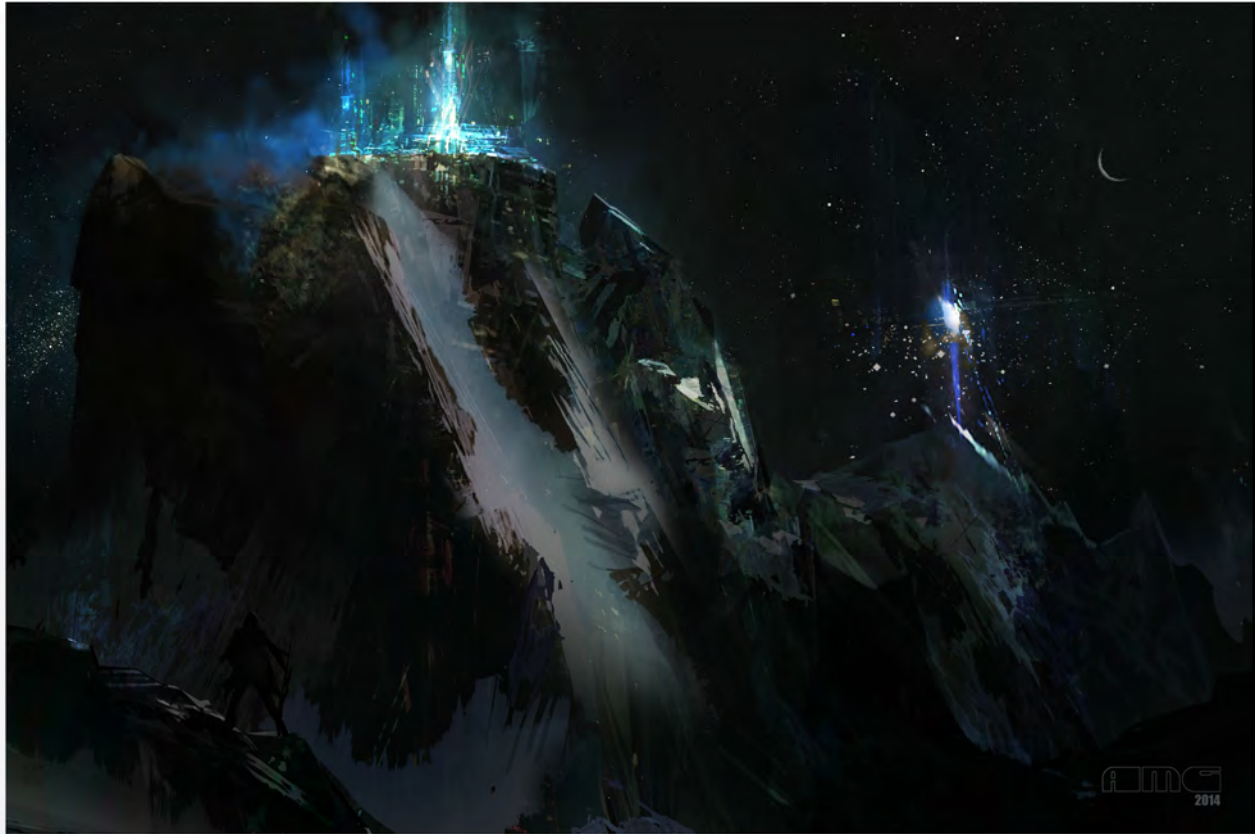
Wyrms are forces of nature in an unnatural realm. These terrifying serpentine behemoths resemble dragons in many respects, but calling a wyrm a dragon is like patting a saber-toothed tiger on the head and calling it 'kitty'. Whereas your stereotypical dragon has wings, scales, and breathes fire, a wyrm lofts its miles-long body by the power of sorcery alone, armors itself in eldritch substances like blistering lava or prismatic force, and lays waste with gouts of molten holy silver, freezing purple starlight, or annihilating torrents of pure corruption. Some, such as the haughty, golden-horned Heliopherox, serve the Eidolon as overseers and guardians; others, such as the world-eating Orobu-



Na-Quetza, do the work of the Umbra by consuming entire continents for lunch. Possessing genius-levels intellects and eons worth of acquired artifacts and spellcasting experience, wyrms are the true power of the Verse Arcanum, and do not take kindly to a challenge.

Notable Locations

The above-mentioned denizens are not confined to a single terrestrial globe, since the Verse Arcanum sees fit not to operate in concepts so mundane as nice round planets. Testament to the infinite variety and variability of gossamer reality, “worlds” in the Verse Arcanum are immense flat land masses floating in the infinite ethereal void while their patron sun-gods and attendant moon-women circle around at the pace of whatever great cosmic beasts pull their chariots. Most of the Gossamer Lords I know have their Towers and interests on a verdant, mountainous super-continent called Uru-Aum, but Lucien teases that he has files on realms largely unmapped. A vast carnage-strewn battleground full



of thrice-cursed warriors, a starry world-tree with entire celestial civilizations nestled amongst its branches, and a treacherous faerie realm from which no outsider has ever returned. Private pocket-dimensions and more esoteric sub-realms drift about in the ether as well, acting as closets for powerful wizards or as prisons for ancient threats. Travel between Uru-Aum and other worlds within the Verse Arcanum is feasible by teleportation, mystic portal, specially-ensorcelled flying mount, dwarven ether-ship, or a network of so-called rainbow “bridges” which *I* would describe as “psychedelic prismatic bullet-trains without brakes, seat belts, or pity.” Though these mysterious destinations may seem tempting, I wouldn't recommend venturing too far from the

nearest known Door without a solid survival strategy and as much mystical mojo as you can carry.

The Witch's Spine is the longest, tallest mountain range on Uru-Aum, full of rich enchanted mineral deposits and covered in a crosshatch of potent ley lines. Several Gossamer Lords have sited their Towers along the range, capping easily defensible peaks or tucked away in lush valleys – never too close, but at a few popular junctions you can waive to your neighbor if the sky is clear and your eyesight is keen. Faerie circles and ancient megaliths dot the surrounding highlands, and in the stretches between demesnes you'll find wizard-ruled castles, buried dwarven forge-works, and roving stone giant tribes with a penchant for haruspicy and painting themselves blue.

The current Door to the Verse Arcanum opens into the pegasi stables of Red Cauldron Keep, the mountaintop home of Phineas Redpot, a doddering gnome alchemist (and likely Maegistirium spy) who pretends to be too senile and decrepit to notice the comings and goings of strange visitors from his property.

Barrowborn's Academy of Enchantment and the Necromantic Arts used to be Uru-Aum's most well-attended school for the mystic arts, accepting hundreds of fresh-faced apprentices each year and producing some of the Verse Arcanum's finest enchanters, all under the wizened eye of Eternal Headmaster Juniper Barrowborn, the kindest old lich you'd ever meet. That was before the curse, and the fire, and the massacre. Now the Academy is a soot-stained tomb, its dormitories filled with charred corpses and its halls infested with

scavenging spell-eaters come to suck the mystic marrow from its bones. A tortured, half-mad Barrowborn still haunts the grounds searching for any clue that might unravel the mystery of who betrayed the Academy, and give the lich that which he most desperately craves: a target for his unholy vengeance.

Final Thoughts

The Verse Arcanum is a place of enchantment and wonder, its doors open wide to all of the possibilities that magic allows. In my experience, however, “magical” rarely equates to “good”. Respect local superstitions, fear dragons, and never ever *ever* eat anything recommended to you by someone with pointy ears.

~ Yaeger Zane

Verse Arcanum Domain Table

Technology Level:	Medieval / Other (advanced magical innovation)
Magic Level:	Magic Nullifies Technology
Security:	Varies according to each Tower/demesne
Type:	Common Ground [2 Points] (multiple simultaneous owners)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to one's own demesne)
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Strong Umbra – Strong Wrighting – Easy
Special:	Magical energy is super-abundant in the Verse Arcanum; most uses of Sorcery require only half the usual time and effort, and Cantrips do not drain a caster's vitality at all. Also, the Verse Arcanum can be (and is) claimed by multiple Gossamer Lords simultaneously, with each individual owner occupying and controlling one (and only one) Tower and surrounding demesne.