

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: The Otherlands



by Matt Banach





Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: The Otherlands

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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The Otherlands

"The staircase spiraled down into depths, twisting wrong-wise, and I left the sweltering heat of burning brass behind as the eerie cool of alien stone took over. I felt like I was burrowing down into something ancient, something I shouldn't be touching, something waiting for me to touch it anyway. The staircase unwound into an echoing cavern – the dank, dark hub of the catacombs. Stepping out onto the dirty yet barren floor of packed barrow-earth, I looked around for the nearest Door and caught it staring at me from the recesses of a rough-hewn alcove. It shone like pale moonlight on a starless night, its crisp and unmistakable shape an abomination of rectangular perfection. This wasn't a Door... it was what Doors dreamt of becoming."

- Yaeger's Travelogue

A Word of Warning

What I'm about to tell you isn't just controversial – it's heresy. Maybe Lucien's right, I am a sloppy researcher, and a damned fool... but you be the judge. Either way, if you repeat any of my theories, don't expect the other Lords to nod politely. This gets weird.

Description

The multiverse is a big place, filled with infinite variations on infinite

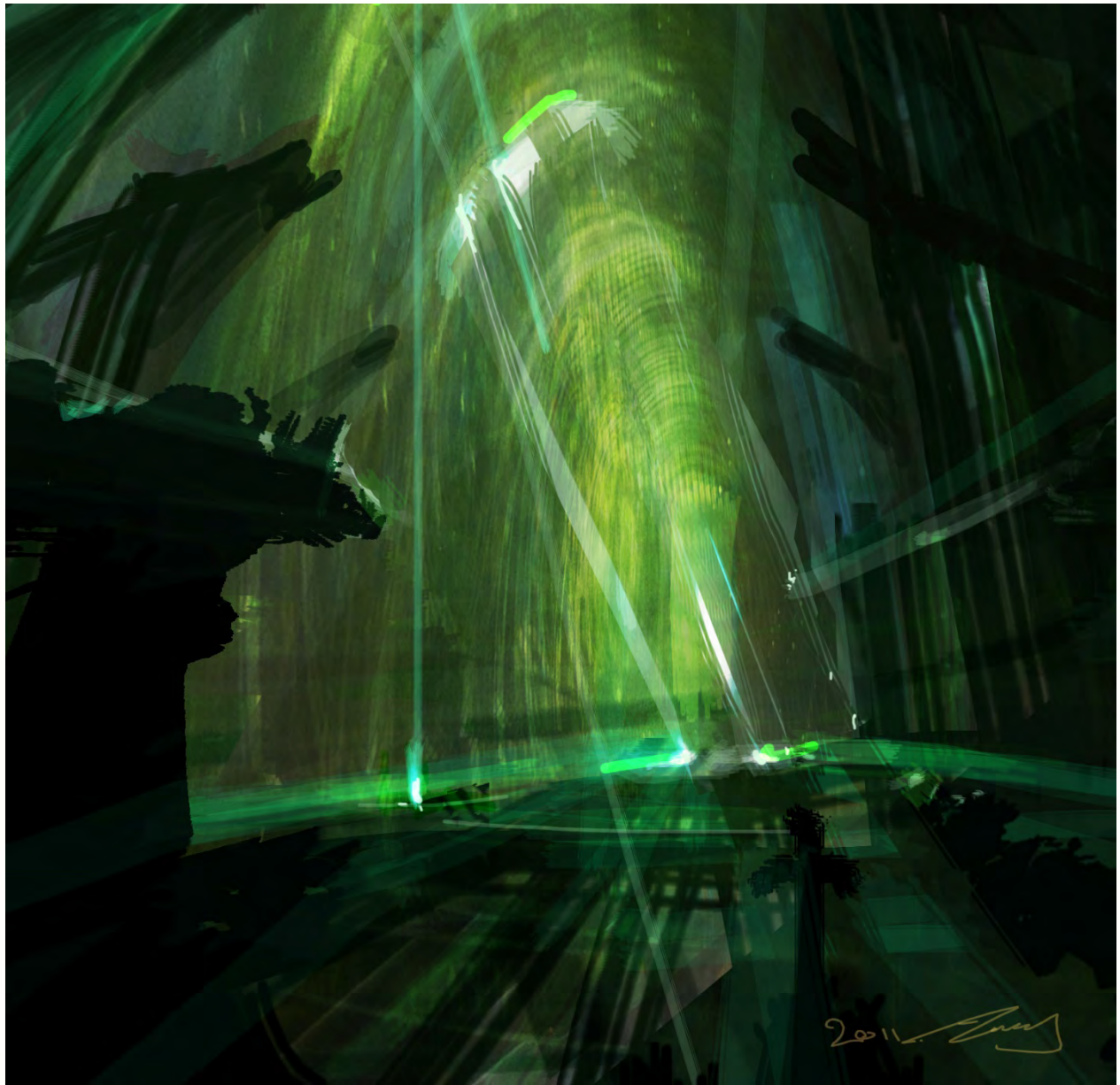
themes, iterating every conceivable combination of gossamer matter across its myriad realities. Just as striking as the vast differences between worlds are the occasional, eerie similarities. If you've traveled the vast span of the Grand Stair for any length of time, presumably you've seen things like this: something seeming to be the same person, place, or thing, yet not, in truth separated from its gossamer clones by a gulf as big as universes. I don't claim to know exactly why or how these mirror-like iterations occur – probably something to do with 9th-dimensional cosmic super-math that'd make my head hurt – but I remark on the phenomenon to highlight something...

You see, some realities out there don't just sit around idle – some realities have a way of *spreading*. So sometimes, when you get that sense of *deja vu*, there really might be something to it, not because you remember this gossamer reality – but because the reality remembers *you*.

Sometimes realities are people too.

'The Other' is a viral, empowered, omni-sentient gossamer reality with the ability to open Doors and propagate *itself* throughout the multiverse via the Grand Stair, spreading like an ever-sprawling kudzu... or a virus... or a cancer.

'*Footholds*' begin when a piece of the Otherlands – typically an ambulatory being such as an Emissary, but possibly an artifact or a chunk of environmental



matter – enters the host-world via a Door. Think of this like a seed. Once the seed germinates and takes root, metaphorically and metaphysically speaking, it begins imprinting the local gossamer matter with the template of the Other, absorbing, digesting, and re-coding the local reality into a new foothold region of the Otherlands. This process is gradual and slow, taking anywhere from years to

centuries. At first, only a small patch of territory or handful of beings may show change, such as an eerie forest glade filled with toadstool rings frequented by a few odd wanderers who all seem touched by something strange. Maybe the locals denizens try and fight this encroachment, or maybe the influence seeps in all around them too gradually to notice, but

eventually, inevitably, these isolated oddities become the way of the land.

'Chrysalis Realms' occur as when, over the course of time and centuries become millennia, these footholds mature – regions ranging in size from that of a city (e.g., a hidden faerie forest, or an alien colony, or the floating island of weirdness) to an entire parallel sub-dimension (e.g., a dark-mirror fairyland, or haunted demon realm, or arcane spirit world). In these chrysalis realms, the Other has completely appropriated the gossamer matter of the host-world; it is, for all intents and purposes, part of the Otherlands. The Other maintains connection between these chrysalis realms through the travels of Emissaries, facilitated by constant manipulation of the Doors of the Grand Stair via its Mastery of the Grand Stair. The Other can and will exert influence and energy to maintain these outposts, defending them from outright destruction as necessary, though as an alien superconsciousness with an attention span measured in eons, the Other cares little about day-to-day violence against its flora and fauna and reacts only to the most apocalyptic of threats against the realm itself.

'Echo Realms' occur when the Other abandons a world, leaving a metaphorical husk of gossamer matter behind. The reasons for these withdrawals are not well understood, but it is reported that during the great war with the Dwimmerlaik the

Other withdrew its influence from hundreds (if not thousands or more) of gossamer worlds, retracting the vastness of its sprawling empire of self down to a mere handful of remote locations. An echo realm appears much like it did as a chrysalis realm – enchanted forests remain, faerie kingdoms persist – but the animus and power of the Other is missing; while the echo realm may go through the motions of existence for ages afterward, the presence which defined the echo realm as something other than the host reality is gone, leaving the previously-templated gossamer matter vulnerable to destruction, dilution, or re-absorption. Many are the tales of faerie kingdoms which once knew legendary greatness but now linger as but a pale shadow of their former selves...

For some reason, I don't think the Other ever completely overwrites a host reality. Even if the chrysalis realm is so widespread that it occupies a supermajority of the available space, as far as I can tell there's always something original left over, either in scattered pockets or laced throughout. Variation and adaptation breed strength, and by incorporating some of the metaphysical DNA of the host worlds into its myriad colonies-of-self, the Other must gain some sort of benefit. Maybe that's how it got this far. Maybe that's how it learns. Theoretically, there might be some original 'Otherland Prime', the first seed,



ancestor of them all... but before you ask, No, I don't know where it is. That mystery lays buried in the ashes and rubble of the Dwimmerlaik War, and I can only imagine that knowing such a secret, much less *going* there, would be unfathomably dangerous. Still, one wonders.

Since the Otherlands are not just one world, but many worlds, with each one of those worlds an amalgamation of the Other and artifacts of the native host reality, describing this gossamer reality is damn near impossible. There are, however, several strong themes which appear throughout the various Otherlands: they are *strange* realms, filled with alien entities and warped landscapes; they are *supernatural* worlds, run by primal magics and powerful spirits; and they are *surreal*, unfettered by rigid physical laws and prone to weird metaphysical arrangements like dualism,

mirror-realms, and dreamscapes. Oftentimes they are, or contain, powerful faerie realms and shadowy spirit worlds, and I think there's a reason such myths are so prevalent across all the gossamer worlds up and down the Grand Stair – how do you know if the fey kingdom or demon-plane on gossamer world X is really part of gossamer world X at all? Did it form that way of its own accord, or because the Other taught it how?

To give you a more concrete example, I'll tell you about the Otherland I last visited. It was a mystic, primordial faerie-alien realm arranged on the spiral arms of a cloud of thought-mutable gossamer matter, laid out in the shape of a seven-armed starfish the size of a solar system. The underside of the spiral-world was a spooky demonic mirror-world, prone to bubbling up into the fey kingdoms at night, when invoked, or really any time

the demon princes got their nerve up. After entering through the Shining Door (accessed in the center of the Barrow-Mound Catacombs, the part you can get to just below the Tower of Boiling Brass), crossing over into the main part of the world itself required passage on a glass boat with hovering concentric circles for sails – the cackling ferryman gleefully let slip that the roiling not-water we were sailing across was an ocean of unborn souls. Past the broken-glass shore there was a labyrinth of rows of emerald hills, each pregnant mound carved with the runes of the barrow-tribes dancing beneath. The portion of the world I traipsed about was an immense forest of gigantic dreaming mother-trees, each with a resurrection-womb of a star-child beating at the center of her trunk. Every pool of water or other reflective surface served as a portal to the demonic underverse, and the one time I tried to shave I nearly got my soul stolen by a rather handsome but still nefarious doppelganger. Every flower was filled with eyes, and every moment of every day I felt like I was being watched by something that had watched me before.

You know, one of *those* places.

Typical Denizens

“Faelien” (fae + alien) are how I would describe the typical denizens of the Otherlands. These bizarre creatures may

share some superficial qualities and features with the fair folk of common myth (and in many worlds, fact) but seem rooted in a reality far more primordial and strange. I put it this way: what faeries are to humans, faeliens would be to faeries. These are not the creatures of legend, they are of the legends that even the legends have forgotten to tell.

Shining Ones are a quirky yet prolific breed of faelien, closest in mannerism and activity to humanoids as you or I might understand them. There are myriad different subspecies, but the shining ones I encountered looked like willow-thin bejeweled dryads with stars for brains – an odd but harmonious chimera of animal, vegetable, mineral, and raw energy. Some were bipedal, but others glided about on skirts of tentacle-esque vines like half-hovering octopi. You know, normal folk. When I arrived in their midst, a few of the more curious ones shifted their shapes so that their torsos resembled comely androgynes, but the accommodation struck me as eerily patronizing, like someone speaking to a nine-year-old in baby talk. Attuned to the Eidolon and the high harmonies of its pattern, they practiced ritualistic arts which seamlessly blended song, dance, magic, and mathematics; I witnessed one orgiastic rave which was equal parts midsummer festival, demon summoning, and cellular rejuvenation treatment. In other Otherlands, the shining ones may translate as the ethereal ur-elves who



Scattered One

dwell in distant heavens, as primal natural muses and dryad-spirits, or even as starry-eyed aliens in flying saucers.

Scattered Ones are breeds of faeliens tied closely to the Umbra, which means their activities tend to be creative, chaotic, destructive, and they're prone to mutation and shape-changing, defying easy description. One scattered one I met began as a hunched goblinoid about four feet tall, cackling as she painted apocalyptic runes on a cave wall; then she laughed herself out of her own body, floating about as a smoky haze; then when she grew bored her smoke-body condensed into a burbling slick of tar-black ooze, seeping down into the underground to speak-meld with other of her ilk in a subterranean city more like an

oil reservoir than any burg. While 'evil' is far too facile a label for the scattered ones, they certainly aren't interested in your well-being or your feelings, and the closest they get to polite behavior is sinister, snarky doom-saying as they try and trick you into some sort of devil's bargain. Many scattered ones are devils and demons, but not all devils and demons are scattered ones. In other Otherlands, scattered ones translate as wicked leprechauns, mischievous gremlins, or even naughty grey aliens out there mutilating cattle and probing backwater yokels.

Hungry Ones are a bigger, more physically potent breed of common faelien – the stuff of man-eating-ogre tales and legendary giants, but twisted by



Hungry One

eldritch influences which give them appetites far darker and more sinister than the classic 'blood of an Englishman'. The few hungry ones I've encountered were a breed with deep ultraviolet skin, twenty feet tall on average and armored in rocky formations grown from some

sympiotic super-fungus. They were powerful shamans capable of terrible magics, including their own eldritch techniques for manipulating true names, binding souls, and trapping mystical energy and beings long enough to be eaten. As I met that particular tribe, their

magicians were in the process of taking over a forest from some Shining Ones, constructing an immense array of upside-down pyramidal structures which I later learned were used to trap, freeze, and digest a swath of territory the size of a small moon. In other Otherlands, hungry ones translate as nefarious ogre-mages, arcane giant-kings, or, in one notable case, hulking devourers of worlds.

Threats

Emissaries are the most potent creatures of the Other, defending its network of realms both in the gossamer realities themselves and out along the expanses of the Grand Stair. Emissaries come in many forms – shining archangels, acid-tongued demon lords, ethereal faerie princesses, alien heralds, or stranger still. While Emissaries do the divine bidding of the Other and often speak as though they held its singular authority (if it can be even considered to have a singular identity in any form we'd recognize), it is a mistake to conceptualize an Emissary as an avatar of the Other itself; the superconsciousness of the Other is far too vast to be embodied in a single form, nor could any connection to such a small extension be vital enough to serve as a route to the reality's true, deep psyche. In other words, destroying or influencing an Emissary doesn't actually gain you any ground in controlling the Other itself – they are but minor appendages, tools the overmind can drop from its grasp should

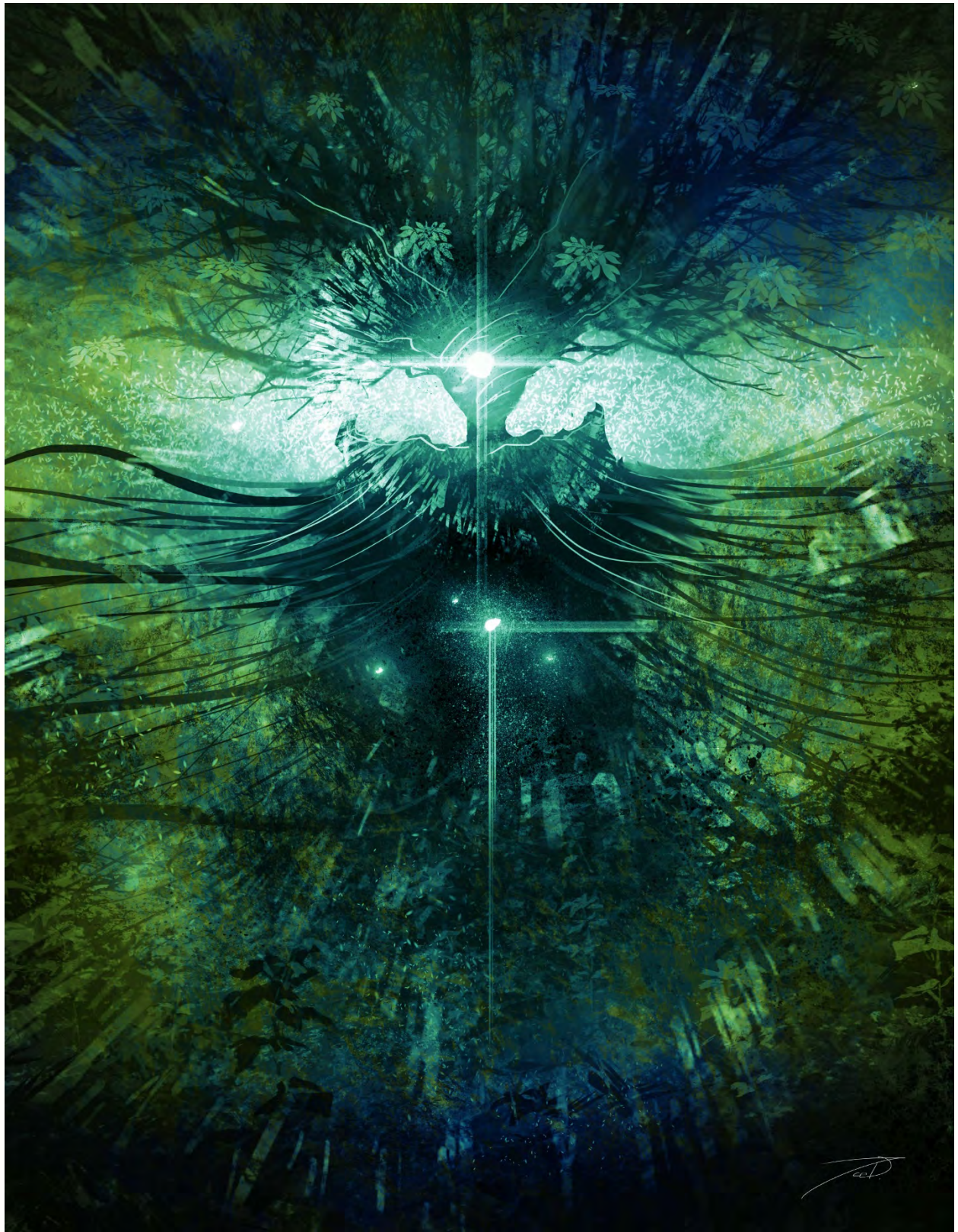
they become compromised. That said, Emissaries should be respected and/or feared, especially in locations where they can draw upon the full power of the Other, as they've proven to be some of the most potent and terrifying walkers of the Grand Stair ever encountered.

Xana Mega is one of the Otherlands' most legendary emissaries – the faerie queen to rule all faerie queens. Appearing as a tall elfin woman with a crown of brambles and emerald light, this aloof alien goddess radiates an aura of beauty and awe so overwhelming her mere sight has been known to strike mortals blind and prompt even Gossamer Lords to wince and shed a tear. Carrying with her a branch of silver apple blossoms which releases shimmering reality-seeds with every swish, Xana Mega is responsible for the propagation of the Other to an untold number of gossamer worlds.

Xana Mega, the Shining One

Xana Mega has the following qualities:

- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points] – *adept at archery as well as brawling with teeth and talons*
- Deadly Damage [4 Points] – *capable of unleashing blasts of reality-rending faerie-fire, as well as shooting bolts of psychic lightning from her silver bow*



- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points] – *with skin brighter and harder than diamonds, and a glare hot enough to burn swords to ash*
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Search Through Worlds [4 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Creatures [2 Points] – *adept at god-like mind control and emotional command*
- Rapid Healing [2 Points]
- Limited Shape Shift [4 Points] – *can take the form of a beautiful female of any race or species*
- True Name is Warded [2 Points]

Powers: Xana Mega has her own suite of innate mystical abilities, the equivalent of all the common Sorcery spells. Also, the Other can use its Master of the Grand Stair abilities through Xana Mega, as if the Power were her own.

When located in one of the Otherlands, or a well-developed Chrysalis Realm, Xana Mega draws additional power directly from the reality of the Other and her qualities improve to include:

- Stupendous Vitality [8 Points]
- Destructive Damage [8 Points]
- Impervious to Harm [8 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points]
- Regeneration [4 Points]

Doppelgangers are dangerous spirits of the Otherlands with the ability not only to mimic their prey, but steadily grow in power until they are the very equal

of their quarry. They start out as bodiless, invisible concepts laying dormant, fond of nesting in reflective surfaces, malleable substances such as mud or sand, and in stray personal possessions. Mystical power is very attractive to doppelgangers, so they have a penchant for targeting sorcerers or anyone carrying potent artifacts. A doppelganger stalking begins with faint, creepy encounters, like your reflection in a pool of water winking back, or a nearby sand dune shifting to resemble your collapsed body; but the longer the doppelganger stalks its prey, the greater its interest, and the more mystical energy and gossamer matter it will pull from the surrounding environment to make itself a body-in-replica. A mid-stage doppelganger might appear as a mud-man, or a tangle of vegetation that walks and talks like you, picking up your things and watching you while you sleep.

Doppelgangers can be attacked, harmed, and temporarily dispelled at this stage, but barring extraordinary mystical remedies they usually just revert to being bodiless spirits... and resume stalking their quarry almost immediately. They're tenacious. If allowed to lurk and perfect their mimicry for too long, a doppelganger will eventually craft itself into a flawless clone of its target, complete with replication of any magical abilities or other Powers the spirit might've seen the target use. And yes, just so you know, doppelgangers *can* effectively mimic a being as powerful as a Gossamer Lord, given enough time to study their quarry. So, should you ever find yourself in the

Otherlands staring through the mists at a mirror image of yourself, take care – a doppelganger's ultimate goal is to destroy, consume, and replace its victim, achieving some sort of metaphysical apotheosis so ecstatic and profound that it will eagerly pursue such end for an eternity. Doppelgangers are supremely patient, too, so just because you gave one the slip a century ago doesn't mean the same foul presence isn't waiting for you on the other side of that Door, eager to resume the hunt.

Doors in the Otherlands are a threat all their own, due to the disturbing fact that the omniscience of the Other can employ all the dirty tricks of a Master of the Grand Stair. This is really pretty horrifying, if you think about it for more than half a second. The Other can *create* Doors, theoretically linking any door inside its multitudinous sub-realms to the vast span of Grand Stair. It can *bridge* doors within its worlds, allowing its agents and minions to traverse its breadth and width nigh-instantly, bringing specialists and hordes to bear against any problematic situation in a blink. Once you're inside the Otherlands, it can *sever* the Door through which you entered, trapping you wherever it pleases. Should the Other take an interest in you, it can even, through its Emissaries, *manipulate* Doors along the Grand Stair to bring you to one of its realms, diverting a Door from its natural destination and shrouding that

divergence such that you might not realize the switch until you're through. Making matters even worse, the Other can even *affect* the Grand Stair, with great effort rearranging its configuration to frustrate foes or ensnare victims. Scared yet? We among the Gossamer Lords are perhaps too comfortable believing that most problems can be evaded simply by stepping through the nearest Door and traipsing away, but... sometimes it isn't that easy. So, no matter what you do, do not make an enemy of the Other – it survived war with the Dwimmerlaik, after all. It can find you. It can reach you. It can twist this whole crazy multiverse around its finger and make you dance on gossamer strings. There's a reason why, all over the multiverse, there are so many *eerily similar* legendary tales and mythological odysseys which begin with the hero stepping through an odd door and emerging in a strange shining otherworld beyond the sea...

Notable Locations

Tír na nÓg is verdant land of everlasting youth, its grassy hillocks covered with sun-dappled dryad-groves and lucky clover meadows. Sometimes it may seem to be Valhalla, or Nirvana, or the Elysian Fields, as local gossamer reality subtly (or not-so-subtly) shifts itself to appeal to visitors – and there are



Tír na nÓg

visitors a-plenty, tricked or tempted through the land's multitudinous but constantly-shifting Doors. Home to many ancient tribes of Shining Ones, the realm appears at first and second glance to be a faerie paradise where intoxicating ambrosia drips from every flower petal and not even the night can be called dim, what with all the dancing star-children and laughing pixie-fire. One might be tempted to relax and even luxuriate in such a blissful place, laying down for a day-drunken nap with a buxom nymph or three... only to find time and self and willpower slipping away like sand castles before the tide. Despite its pleasures – actually, *because* of its pleasures – Tír na nÓg is profoundly dangerous place. The Other lets the pace of time-flow fluctuate wildly in this realm, and one day can

easily become a week... or a century... or a lifetime. Beneath every toadstool ring lays the moldering corpse of a wayward traveler, and the place is *filled* with toadstool rings. Really and truly, I think Tír na nÓg is an entire sub-realm designed by the Other to be ensnare juicy beings from other realities, like the sickly-sweet lure of a flytrap just waiting to seal shut around a little buzzing thing like you or me.

The Underworld lurks beneath all of the Otherlands, either physically, symbolically, or sub-dimensionally. Entrance into the Underworld can be made through the dark caves, which appear beneath green hills, crossing a river in the right or wrong way, or perhaps merely making a psychic shift that reveals



Underworld

the underlay of a shadowy parallel realm. Ferryman and guardian hounds are common encounters, but such figures pre-date classical Charon and Cerberus by untold eons; these are the deepest roots of legend, the Platonic ideals of which our familiar icons are but flickering shadows on the cave wall. The Underworld is a realm of spirits and a land of the dead – of ghosts, walking corpses (some ghastly, some merely pallid), and beings otherwise turned the wrong way down the highway of life.

I'll note that in Chrysalis Realms where the Other has overwritten and co-opted the native reality, oftentimes the local translation of the Underworld is the one remaining place you can find the souls and semblances of those beings who died during the takeover, refusing to surrender to the dominant paradigm and consigned

to an eternity of pale remembrance. But in the cavernous subterranean Underworld of the Otherlands which I visited, dead things hung about in cocoon-like coffin-pods spun from milky-white gossamer, transmitting photonic data-streams amongst each other along glimmering silken wires, forming a vast super-computer as large as death itself. Twisted little Scattered Ones scurried about like elemental cockroaches, nibbling at untended nodes and occasionally dragging defunct pods down into the terminal abyss of Shadow. Even the dead can die a bit more, I suppose, so the visit simply reinforced my preexisting and staunchly-held belief that dying in the Otherlands is a very, very bad idea.

The Mirrored Labyrinth is a maddening echo-chamber of reality where the Otherland warps itself to reflect

and accommodate any visitor, resembling a twisted version of some other gossamer reality familiar to the interloper. Were the labyrinth ever inclined to reveal its 'true' form, it might appear as a twisted mirror-maze, or an infinite field of reflecting pools, but rarely will the labyrinth appear as itself – it is a doppelganger as large as an entire sub-dimension, and loves nothing more than toying with prey who've recently stumbled in from the Grand Stair. The whole area is infested with doppelganger-spirits simply salivating at the thought of fresh meat to mimic. Unfortunately, Doors to the Otherlands often open into the metaphorical vestibule of the Mirrored Labyrinth, affording visitors the horrible opportunity to either go one way and find themselves in some insidious mirror-realm rabbit-hole, or go the other way and maybe make it to the riverbank where you can grab a ferry. The last time I visited the Otherlands, the shining Door through which I stepped brought me into what appeared to be one of my favorite penthouse apartments, decorated exactly as I'd left it... except all the corpses had been replaced by undulating violet tentacle-things which were doing their best impression of my fallen friends and lovers. I took a quick left and didn't stay.



Final Thoughts

The thought of a mobile, expanding, and sentient reality should scare you – it certainly scares me. Maybe I'm completely off my rocker and all of this is the idiotic speculation of a reckless fool... but maybe I'm right, and that means there's a presence out there with the potential to absorb and *become* all of existence. Maybe the Dwimmerlaik went to war with this thing for good reason.

~ Yaeger Zane

The Otherlands Domain Table

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Technology Level: | Primitive/Other (high magic replaces technology) |
| Magic Level: | Magic Nullifies Technology |
| Security: | Guarded [4 Points] (by the Emissaries and the world itself; all Doors reaching the Otherlands are under the realm's complete control, though most travelers are allowed to come and go freely) |
| Type: | Primal World [4 Points] (permanent owner: The Other) |
| Control: | Control of Destiny [4 Points] |
| Influence on the Powers: | Eidolon – Powerful Umbra – Powerful Wrighting – Blocked |
| Special: | <i>Gossamer World/Gossamer Lord</i> – The Other is a supersentient gossamer reality which possesses its own Powers, including Master of the Grand Stair and all the sub-abilities such Power entails; hence, it can create new Doors, sever Doors, manipulate Doors, and traverse the Grand Stair (through its Emissaries), etc. Using this frightening level of access to the multiverse, the Other can and does spread itself virally into other gossamer worlds – see <i>Footholds, Chrysalis Worlds, & Echo Realms</i> , above. |

How to Use The Otherlands

- Use the Otherlands to shock and humble your players, presenting them with an adversary far greater in scope than even the vaunted Gossamer Lords. The Other doesn't just influence multiple gossamer worlds... *it is* multiple gossamer worlds.
- Hint at the existence of the Other slowly, dispensing small clues, only understandable in retrospect, across the multiverse. Many, many worlds can be chrysalis realms of the expansive Otherlands, and the reveal will be all the more surprising when the characters realize they've already been there, time and again.
- The characters meet an Emissary of the Otherlands along the Grand Stair, but the strange being merely passes them by, busy on its own errands. The Emissary can be followed back to a freshly-sown foothold region of the Otherlands where the characters can witness the Other's amazing process of replication and expansion.
- The Other manipulates a Door or two along the Grand Stair to bring the characters into the Otherlands, subjecting them to the maddening reality-traps of the Mirrored Labyrinth and the blissful temptations of Tír na nÓg. While occupied with the realm's

strangeness, the characters attract the attention of some doppelgangers intent on stalking their newfound prey for eternity.

- Maybe Yaeger's Zane's theory on the Otherlands is misguided nonsense, nothing more than a tall tale; the characters shouldn't believe everything they're told.
- The Otherlands has been spreading aggressively recently, increasing the rate of its expansion exponentially. The Gossamer Lords have taken notice, and the character's mentor implores them to research the phenomenon.
- An ancient rumor hints of a Dwimmerlaik plot to combat the Other with an opposing expansive reality, acting like a predatory species to keep the population of Otherlands under control. But, is the solution worse than the problem? The answers, and more questions, can be found in a long-lost Dwimmerlaik research facility in one of the most hostile environments imaginable, and the facility is not as abandoned as the rumors led the characters to believe.
- Maybe history got it wrong, and the Dwimmerlaik were the heroes all along, fighting against a cancerous reality threatening to overtake the multiverse when they were prevented from eradicating this foe by the misinformed meddling of the Gossamer Lords. Can they return from exile in time to save us? Will they?

