

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Addendum: Empathy



by Jason Durall





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Addendum: Empathy

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Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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Addendum: Empathy

The Gossamer worlds are dominated by the Great Powers: the Eidolon and the Umbra... and perhaps others. Within the infinity of worlds, however, many other powers also hold sway. Some are universal, found throughout the Gossamer worlds, while others are unique to only a single Gossamer world, ineffectual outside it. Between these extremes are the Lesser Powers, those that span many Gossamer worlds and are practiced in a relatively similar fashion no matter where one goes on the Grand Stair.

Some of these Lesser Powers are Wrighting, Invocation, Sorcery, and Cantrips. The Dwimmerlaik use Channeling, and the Blessings & Curses power has been published elsewhere.

This release details Empathy.

Empathy [30 Points]

Empathy is a Lesser Power, a type of mind-based magic relatively widespread across the Gossamer worlds. Many worlds feature psychic powers, whether commonplace, rare, or even thought imaginary. The most common is Empathy, concerned primarily with mental communication and sensing.



Users of Empathy are called *Empaths*. Empaths have a variety of abilities relating to the mind: they can sense the minds of others from great distances, read surface thoughts, communicate telepathically, judge others' degrees of Psyche, and even mask their own Psyches, hiding from psychic detection. Empaths can mask pain or shift it away from others, and can speed the healing process. Furthermore, Empaths can dominate weak minds, rendering them open to suggestion. Vastly weaker opponents can be paralyzed physically or mentally. Empathy comes with dangers, though, and should be used judiciously. Opening one's mind with another and forming an

empathic link is a two-way street: a bridge between minds might turn into an avenue for an assault into the Empath's own mind.

Attribute Tips for Empathy

The first and foremost Attribute for Empathy is Psyche. As with all powers that depend upon manipulation of magic energy (whether originating from the user or some focal point), Psyche is the dominant Attribute. Some abilities that the Psyche Attribute confers can even be viewed as untrained aspects of Empathy.

For long-term use of Empathy or extensive use of its healing capabilities, Endurance is a useful support Attribute, and will help offset any ill effects from an empathic link with a wounded mind.

Warning: Drawbacks to Empathy

The Empathy power, like most activities involving manipulating other minds, comes with some inherent dangers, listed below.

Susceptibility to Psyche

To use Empathy, an Empath must become open and receptive to the flow of psychic (and magical) energies in the immediate area. This has the unfortunate effect of becoming

potentially susceptible to these influences, exposing the Empath's mind to the presence of other psychically-powerful beings or conditions that might attempt a psychic or magic assault.

When an Empath is using this power and unexpectedly encounters a hostile mind, that potential enemy can use the opportunity to immediately attempt a psychic attack. If the hostile mind acts quickly enough, this attack can come before the Empath can raise any psychic defenses. If the Empath is not attacked in that initial moment of psychic contact, however, the chance is lost and the Empath is aware of the other psychic presence and can act defensively against it. If such a conflict occurs and there is a question about who acts first between the Empath and the potential attacker, superiority in Psyche should be the determining factor, with Warfare as a potential secondary influence.

Vulnerability to Magic

Similarly, using Empathy on another character leaves the mental "doors" wide open for a magic-based attack, whether in the form of cantrips, racked spells, or even True Names. Since an established empathic link is a two-way street, these sorts of magic attacks can be made from either party and will almost always succeed (or at least strike the subject), unless there is some interference or an alternate means of defense is in place.

Susceptibility to Icons

Users of the power are also especially vulnerable to Icons, which can be used against any Empath rash enough to use the Empathy power indiscriminately. Usually, mere Icon use does not confer any edge against Empaths, but Wrights can utilize Icons more effectively against an Empath. When an Empath's mind is in an empathic link with a Wright, the Wright can utilize the Empath's Icon to gain a more thorough look inside the Empath's mind. Similarly, a Wright ranked high in Psyche using an Icon to contact an Empath can potentially force a psychic contact and hold it open in a way that normal Icon use does not permit. The Icon Defense ability can also be used against Empathy.

Interaction with Invocation

As the Invocation power concerns learning and manipulating the secret True Name to every living being and/or item of power, Empaths have a bit of an advantage here. If an Empath has the energy and time to delve into the mind of an Invoker, it is possible for the Empath to learn the True Name of that Invoker, taking into consideration any methods of concealment that the Invoker may be using on his True Name and the relative Psyche strengths of the Empath and Invoker involved. An Empath who knows the True Name of a subject and wishes to use it in conjunction with empathic powers will

gain a considerable edge, potentially able to overcome a significant difference in Ranks of Psyche.

Weakness against Channeling

Channeling is primarily psychic in nature, and as such, Empathy has a great deal of overlap with Channeling abilities. For this reason, Empaths should be wary of Channelers: abilities such as Will Binding, Mind Storm, Inflict Pain, and Mind Strike are easier to inflict upon one whose mind is open and undefended. Empaths, however, can readily sense any nearby or latent use of Channeling powers, and Empathy allows greater sensitivity when sensing a Channeler using the Mind Shroud ability.

Empathy and the Great Powers

Like many of the other Lesser Powers, Empathy is agnostic to the Umbra and the Eidolon. Those powers can be used against Empaths and may foul its use, but traditionally it is not overmuch affected by either of them as a matter of course. Empathy is not allied with either organization or disorder, and thus does not bother the Eidolon or Umbra especially.

Eidolon abilities such as Eidolon Defense may help defend against empathic intrusion, but no more so than it would Sorcery or another non-Umbra

power, and similarly, Umbra Defense is not particularly better or worse against Empathy than it is to other powers. The psychological aspects of having the Umbra manifest within the Umbra Master, however, will be readily apparent to an Empath, and may cause some minor psychological distress, depending on the Empath's temperament.

Empathy Abilities

The following abilities are known to all Empaths:



Empathic Link

Like a traditional psychic contact, an Empath can create a psychic link between two or more characters. This link can be created by touch or over a greater distance. Contact by touch does not have to be as close as skin-to-skin, but the more unobstructed by clothing or armor the better.

The range for distance is line-of-sight or through psychic means. Empathic links over greater distances, or for otherwise unseen characters, is possible through the use of Icons, magic, or other magical means of vision, provided the image the Empath receives is an actual representation of the character concurrent with the attempted empathic

link. For example, a live feed depiction of the intended subject would work, while a recorded image would not.

The empathic link is essential to the use of most of the Empathy abilities. Without this connection, many Empathy abilities are limited to only a fraction of their potential, or unusable at all.

This link can be used for psychic combat, spell use, or other Empathy abilities. An empathic link can be used in place of the Sorcery micro-spell Mind Touch, as described in the Sorcery power description on page 46 of *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow*.

The empathic link is different from a simple use of Psyche to attempt a psychic contact, as it is more a passive ability. Using Psyche to open a mind up for psychic contact is (usually) an active manipulation of Psyche: literally forcing a contact, feeling outward with one's will and turning attention upon the subject's Psyche, which will either resist or allow

the contact. Empathic links, however, work in the opposite fashion, opening the Empath to psychic emanations from another character or creature. The specific Psyche the Empath desires contact with is then “tuned in,” akin to finding a radio station, adjusting the reception until the clearest signal possible has been achieved. As such, creating an empathic link does not usually instigate a psychic conflict, depending on the Psyche strength of the subject.

Sensing Psyche

Rather than “tuning in” to a specific Psyche, an Empath may instead attempt to locate other psychic presences (living beings or even sentient items of power) in the same manner, opening the Empath up to any nearby psychic presences. The higher the Psyche, the easier it will be to spot. Artifacts or creatures with the Psychic Defense quality will more-than-likely negate this ability. Distant psychic presences will be faint, corresponding with their relative strength, so a distant-but-powerful Psyche might read stronger than a close-but-faint Psyche. Empaths are usually able to distinguish one from another and to gauge relative distances.

Aura Sense

Empaths can recognize and identify beings by their psychic auras, even if they are disguised, invisible, or

otherwise unseen. The Empath must have encountered the being sometime prior, and must have been paying enough attention to get a psychic “feel” of them. The Empath must be in a state receptive to perceiving psychic auras, and must also be within sight of the being to be recognized. Psychic auras that are especially well-known to the Empath will jump out immediately, while hidden or less-familiar ones will take a moment or two to sort out.

Alternately, an Empath with the Wrighting ability can spend several minutes studying an Icon and can gain the same sense of familiarity with the subject, without actual direct experience of them. This allows the Empath to immediately recognize the subject of an Icon so studied, despite having had no prior experience of them, and will have a general “feel” for the subject’s personality as represented in the Icon.

Item Reading

Empaths can sometimes even get a psychic trace off an inanimate object. Clothing or personal items belonging to other characters might carry some lingering psychic imprint, depending on how long the item was owned and the frequency of its use. Something a character owned for years or used frequently would have a strong psychic imprint, while something used fleetingly or only briefly possessed may not have much of an imprint at all. Similarly, an item that was used in an especially emotional fashion, or during a powerful

emotional event, may become charged with the psychic state of the owner at the time of its use. For example, a murder weapon might carry a psychic imprint of anger (or satisfaction), and a discarded love letter may carry the psychic trace of anguish (or anger).

Danger Sense

This power is identical to the Channeling power described on page 143 of the *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow* core rulebook.

Sensing Thoughts

Once an empathic link is established, it is easy for the Empath to determine the subject's surface thoughts: a non-obtrusive reading far subtler than Psyche-based mental probing. To use this ability, an Empath must create an empathic link, and then quiet her own mind until she can "feel" the linked subject's surface thoughts. This sensing also provides a clear view of the subject's general physical or emotional state. Those beings with a Psyche greater than the Empath might detect the psychic presence of the sensing Empath.

Mind Probe

An Empath can probe the mind of a connected subject, gaining a specific sense of the subject's emotional state

and/or thought processes. This is a one-way ability, allowing the Empath to search the mind of the subject, not two-way mind-to-mind communication. This ability is obvious to the subject if it possesses a rudimentary intelligence or a Superior or higher-Ranked Psyche. Empathic probes are automatic when the subject is willing. If the subject wishes to resist, the Empath must succeed in a psychic conflict. If the Empath loses the Psychic battle, the empathic link ends.

Mind Reading

With a successful, non-resisted psychic link (which includes both willing subjects and those whom the Empath overcame in a psychic combat), an Empath can read a subject's mind fully, rooting through memories, thoughts, emotions, and even the subconscious mind. This level of mind reading even allows the Empath to potentially discover forgotten details or aspects the subject may have not been completely aware of. This requires close proximity (touching) to be fully effective, and is very obvious to the subject whose mind is being read, no matter how much intelligence or psychic ability possessed.

If the subject wishes, sections of memory can be partitioned off as "closed," but these will be obvious to the Empath, and are essentially a psychic version of a "Keep Out" sign. If the Empath chooses to intrude into these

sections of thought or memory, the subject can initiate a psychic conflict to evict the Empath.

Psychic Neutral

Each living being gives off a psychic aura, and with this ability, the Empath can attune their own psychic aura to the surrounding area, rendering it near-impossible to detect except by high-Ranking Psyches. The Empath's aura is not nullified or rendered invisible, but instead becomes camouflaged and indistinguishable from the psychic energies within the Empath's surrounding environment, akin to a psychic chameleon. Trying to detect the Empath by looking for a "blank spot" in the psychic environment is fruitless, as the Empath blends in perfectly with whatever latent psychic energies are in the vicinity. In an area with no residual psychic or magic energies, the Empath becomes nigh-unto-undetectable.

Psychic Neutral characters are also considered out of contact for Icon communication or other spells or powers requiring psychic contact. While Psychic Neutral, the character cannot: attempt other Empathy abilities requiring an empathic link, bring the Eidolon or Umbra to mind, use Channeling powers, use cantrips or spells, communicate via Icon, or use any Artifact or Creature psychically. Any attempt to do any of these activities results in the Empath "uncloaking," and becoming visible to anyone searching using psychic means.

Sensing Psychic Qualities

The Empath is also able to identify if any Psychic Qualities are possessed by another character, Artifact, or Creature. This does not enable the Empath to learn what the exact nature of the being/item is, or the extent of its power, but will identify its ability in a general fashion, such as *"highly-Ranked"* or *"is intelligent and psychically sensitive,"* and so on. The Empath will also be able to recognize if a subject is attuned to the Eidolon or Umbra, though the exact degree of mastery will remain unknown.

Sending

The Empath can project simple messages or emotional states to the subject through an empathic link. These messages or emotional states must be relatively short and simple to understand, defined by the Empath in a few words. The recipient will hear this message as a little voice in the back of the mind. Sending messages through an undetected empathic link can possibly make the subject believe they came from within, such as a conscience or one's own thoughts.

Emotional Manipulation

An Empath can influence a subject's emotional state for better or worse through the empathic link, by projecting a desired emotion to instill upon the subject, or by evoking the subject's own memories to cause certain emotions.

The first method is the most common, projected through a normal empathic link. It can even be directed at an unwilling subject, so long as the empathic link exists. If the subject is aware of what is being attempted and attempts to resist, this overt manipulation can be opposed with a psychic conflict.

The second method can only be performed if the Empath is familiar with the desired memory to be evoked, such as through an existing or prior mind reading or psychic probe. In this case, the Empath knows the specific place in the subject's mind the memory is stored and is able to evoke it in the subject. As with the other method of emotional manipulation, this can be opposed with a psychic conflict.

Advanced Empathy [50 Points]

For characters with the basic version of Empathy, Advanced Empathy costs another 20 Points.

At this level of mastery, the Empath is deeply in tune with the field of psychic energy that binds all living things together. The Empath understands subtle and profound connections between the psychic and physical worlds, and can manipulate psychic emanations and profoundly affect internal and external emotional and physical states.



Attribute Tips for Advanced Empathy

As with the basic version of the power, Psyche is all-important, though a high Endurance is useful for healing or energy transferring.

Advanced Empathy Abilities

The following abilities are available to Empaths with the advanced version of the power:

Empathic Trance

The Empath is able to place their mind and body into a restorative trance, a process that speeds emotional and psychological recovery, allows the Empath the chance to explore complex thoughts and consideration over an issue over a relatively short duration, and can even refresh the physical body, aiding in self-recovery.

To be effective, an empathic trance must be at least ten minutes long, and in that time the Empath spends the equivalent of an hour in self-time. For a rule of thumb, the gamemaster and player should consider time spent in an empathic trance to be 1 to 6 in the world of the Grand Stair. This ability is self-timed: the Empath simply decides how long the empathic trance will last and under what conditions the Empath will awake. This could be a time limit, the duration of a single mental task, or even a trigger word given to a trusted associate. If the expected/desired duration of the empathic trance is reached and a waking condition is not achieved, the Empath can choose to continue in the trance or wake from it regardless.

An Empath could conceivably use this time to figure out something complex like devising a new spell, cutting the preparation time for that spell by the relevant amount (the thirty minutes per micro-spell becomes six minutes apiece), though the lynchpin casting times remain the same.

Any meaningful disturbance, such as physical manipulation or psychic contact with the Empath during an empathic trance will disrupt any activities the Empath was attempting, and the Empath must begin anew if any tasks were not complete.

Healing

The Empath understands the relation between soul and body to an incredible degree, and can use that knowledge to manipulate a body's natural healing processes by influencing the "astral body" of the wounded or sick character, bringing the flesh into line. Essentially, this speeds the subject's healing rate to that of a higher-Ranked Endurance. If the subject's Endurance is Average, healing is achieved as if it is Superior. Superior-Ranked subjects heal at a rate equivalent to Paragon Rank, and Ranked characters as if they were higher up the Attribute ladder.

This healing occurs at this rate only for as long as the subject is in the care of the Empath. When the treatment stops, healing resumes at the subject's normal healing rate.



Transferring Energy

Empaths can access the psychic fields generated by living beings and draw energy from those fields, or lend energy to a subject. Whether given or taken, this energy can be used to refresh an exhausted character, give aid at times when concentration and energy are needed, to fuel powers, spells, or cantrips, or to aid healing.

The Empath can grant or drain a tiny bit of energy (equivalent to the Invigorate cantrip on page 39 of the core rulebook) without requiring an empathic link: just a willing subject. Any further or more significant transfer of energy requires an empathic link with

the desired subject, willing or otherwise. An Empath can transfer energy to or from a subject until either are rendered unconsciousness. Borrowed or loaned energy returns at the normal rate, and excess energy dissipates if it is not used relatively quickly, akin to a body metabolizing a burst of adrenaline.

Empaths can also use this ability passively against the environment itself, soaking up residual energy from the environment, or to bleed energy into the surroundings, if so desired. The amount of energy available will depend on the nature of the place: its inhabitants, the relative level and vigor of any living beings, and the guarded or unguarded state of any physical or psychic energy.

The gains from draining flora and fauna are nowhere as rich as that from vibrant life forms, however. An Empath may choose to flood an area with energy, creating a charged, vibrant space conducive for others to perform magic or psychic abilities, or even to create a temporary space conducive to healing or creative work.

Mind Control

An Empath winning a psychic conflict with a subject may attempt to take control of the subject's mind, briefly controlling the subject to behave according to the Empath's wishes. This is a quick, temporary ability: the subject can only be compelled for a single quick action, such as surrendering an item, giving up information, or performing some immediate physical activity. It cannot be sustained over any length of time. This requires a decisive superiority in Psyche or a willing subject: anything less will be a constant psychic struggle between the Empath and the subject of the attempted mind control.

Even if the psychic conflict is successful, the subject can only be controlled to do something they might conceivably do on their own or if coerced. If the Empath tries to force the subject to reveal some secret, or forces them into a course of action which might threaten their life or would be morally repugnant, then mind control will not

succeed and the subject can attempt to break the empathic link.

Furthermore, this ability is a risky one, as the Empath does not necessarily know if the subject is actually under control. A subject that has successfully resisted the psychic conflict can choose to behave as if mind-controlled, lulling the Empath into a false sense of security. Empaths are generally not very gullible, but a subject with a superior Psyche or a rushed/sloppy attempt at mind control could be disastrous.

Prescience

One of the more amazing Empathy abilities is prescience, where the Empath enters an empathic trance (described prior) opening the mind to psychic emanations, becoming attuned to the machinations of destiny, and even the patterns laid forth by the Eidolon and Umbra upon the material universe.

The immediate effect is akin to the Danger Sensitivity quality for Artifact & Creatures (described on page 50 of the core rulebook). This enables the Empath a vague sense of events in the immediate future, or a hunch about the outcomes for actions about to be taken. This basic danger sense takes only a short while, around ten minutes of time spent in an empathic trance, and will give results that will occur within an hour of emerging from the trance.

A dedicated Empath may go into a longer trance, keeping the same ratio of 1 to 6 parts time spent in the trance versus the game world. Spending an hour, thus, can yield hazy information of what may naturally occur within six hours of emerging from the trance, and a full day can provide a glimpse into the next six days, etc.

These visions are tentative and are inevitably a “most likely” outcome barring the influence of the Great Powers, which means that any event of significance where the Eidolon and Umbra come into play are likely to become highly difficult to predict, due to the way those powers can manipulate and reshape reality. As more powers become involved in activities of import, prescience becomes of lesser use, adding complexity to events that might normally play out in a straightforward fashion. A prescient character may see events moving forwards and backwards, mistakenly identifying critical junctures or crisis points where there are none.

The effects of this ability is entirely at the gamemaster’s discretion, and can be a two-bladed

sword. Empaths who abuse or rely overmuch on prescience may find every single action they take wrought with unnatural significance. Which action will become the proverbial butterfly wing that causes the earthquake? An Empath who ignores warning signs of this ability’s abuse may be prompted into gamemaster-encouraged paranoia. The gamemaster may feed the character strange portents, moments of intense déjà vu, unanticipated consequences from otherwise mundane actions, and an occasional stream of disinformation.

