

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

# Gossamer Worlds: Planet Fiction



Powered by



Erick Wujcik's Diceless Role-Playing

by  
H. M. "Dain" Lybarger





Rite Publishing Presents:

# Gossamer Worlds: Planet Fiction

*Explorer* (Author): H.M. “Dain” Lybarger

*Seeker* (Editor): Savannah Broadway

*Searcher* (Cover Artist): Kamil Jadcak

*Trailblazers* (Interior Artists):

Kamil Jadcak, Johnny Morrow, and Ernanda Souza

*Surveyor* (Cartographer): Jonathan Roberts

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

*Navigator* (Layout): Lj Stephens

*Lost Boy* (Publisher): Steven D. Russell

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

Gossamer Worlds: Planet Fiction Copyright © 2015 Steven D. Russell All rights reserved. Lords of Gossamer and Shadow Copyright © 2012-2013 Steven D. Russell All rights reserved. Erick Wujcik's Diceless Role-Playing and associated marks and logos are trademarks of Diceless by Design Publishing, LLC, and are used under license. See [http://Rpg.drivethrustuff.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=1447](http://Rpg.drivethrustuff.com/product_info.php?products_id=1447) for more information on Erick Wujcik's Diceless Role-Playing.

# Contents

Introduction.....	3	Captain Nemo.....	24
The Man Who Was Real.....	3	Prince Dakkar [65 Points].....	25
Literarily Bent.....	4	The Mysterious Captain [140 Points].....	25
Steam and Sorcery.....	4	Captain Omen, Against All Flags [220 Points].....	25
The Lay of the Lands.....	4	Nemo as an Ally.....	26
Great Albion and the Continent.....	5	Nemo as an Enemy.....	26
Great Albion.....	5	Objectives.....	27
Poictesme.....	6	Cassandra.....	27
Graustark.....	7	Fate Witch [85 Points].....	27
Ruritania.....	7	Hapless Prophetess [185 Points].....	27
Gérolstein.....	8	Oracle of the Eidolon [334 Points].....	28
Transylvania.....	9	Cassandra as an Ally.....	28
Siebenbürgen.....	10	Cassandra as an Enemy.....	28
Altamira.....	10	Objectives.....	28
Portaga.....	11	Scheherazade.....	29
Beyond the Maelstrom.....	11	Captive of the Sultan [10 Points].....	29
Across the Winedark Sea.....	12	Power Behind the Throne [100 Points].....	29
Mykenos.....	12	Author of All [260 Points].....	30
Ptolemais.....	13	The Editor.....	30
Iolaea.....	13	Scheherazade as an Ally.....	30
Tiryns.....	13	Scheherazade as an Enemy.....	30
Southern Lands.....	14	Objectives.....	31
Al-Maghrib.....	14	Umslopogaas.....	31
Ophir.....	15	The Woodpecker [80 Points].....	31
Urewe.....	15	King of Urewe [155 Points].....	31
The Silk Road.....	16	The Slaughterer [280 Points].....	32
Koryo-no-Shima.....	16	Umslopogaas as an Ally.....	33
Chang'an.....	16	Umslopogaas as an Enemy.....	33
Legends of Mericia.....	18	Objectives.....	33
Bajaristan.....	18	Hua Mulan.....	33
Jhind.....	19	Hidden Flower [10 Points].....	33
No Exit.....	20	Reluctant General [110 Points].....	33
Making Sense of it All.....	20	Warrior Without Peer [270 Points].....	34
Sinister Plotting.....	21	Mulan as an Ally.....	34
Revised to Death.....	21	Mulan as an Enemy.....	35
Final Thoughts.....	22	Objectives.....	35
Planet Fiction Domain Table.....	22	Judge Dee.....	35
Upon Melancholy Reflection.....	22	Magistrate Di Huaiying [1 Point].....	35
Dramatis Personae.....	22	Dee Jen-Djeh, Imperial Censor [30 Points].....	35
Sherlock Holmes.....	22	Imperial Sorcerer [250 Points].....	36
Dr. Joseph Bell [35 Points].....	23	Judge Dee as an Ally.....	37
The Consulting Detective [75 Points].....	23	Judge Dee as an Enemy.....	37
The Mastermind [180 Points].....	24	Objectives.....	37
Holmes as an Ally.....	24	Mowgli.....	37
Holmes as an Enemy.....	24	Feral Boy [115 Points].....	37
Objectives.....	24	Young Forester [135 Points].....	38
		The Only Son [250 Points].....	39
		Mowgli as an Ally.....	39
		Mowgli as an Enemy.....	39
		Objectives.....	39



# Gossamer Worlds: Planet Fiction

## Excerpt from “Peregrinations, the travel journal of Remi Haden-Franz”

*I have always been a frequent traveler, not least because I tend to find myself an unwelcome guest after even the briefest sojourns. But the most important reason is simply that I bore easily; if my company wears upon my companions, rest assured that their company wears also upon me.*

*Most people—even most Gossamer Lords and Ladies, if truth be told—are tedious in the extreme. Their lives are full of long interludes where nothing of significance occurs, and most are unable to relate a coherent narrative of their few interesting moments in any case. Life doesn't really imitate art, because life has to include all the boring stretches that writers of fiction wisely leave out.*

*Imagine my delight, then, upon discovering a Gossamer World where the great majority of the residents are actually fictional!*

## The Man Who Was Real

*The Door was of oak, six-paneled and fitted with polished brass. Its knob was sculpted in the form of a snarling lion, and it stood in a row of similar doors down a green-carpeted section of the Stair; one of a veritable zoo of doorknobs. I chose it at random, and in something of a hurry—I was, as usual, eluding unpleasant company. Passing through, I found myself stepping into the streets of a great city. Sounds and smells assaulted my senses: the raucous cries of street vendors, the clatter of hooves on cobblestone, the turgid smell of coal smoke—everything redolent of a bustling industrial metropolis. I'd not walked three feet before I stepped in horse manure. Ah, the joys of urban living!*

*The City—for I never heard any resident call it anything else—was a sprawling metropolis along both sides of a broad river made brown with the effluvia of civilization and the rich mud from further inland. The stink at low tide was an experience never to be voluntarily repeated, yet mudlarks waded to their knees along the banks in hopes of finding some cast-off bit of salvageable merchandise.*

*Two-wheeled hackneys were available for hire, drawn by the sort of horses one finds nearly everywhere among the Gossamer Worlds. I manipulated the Gossamer reality around me, and found in my*

*wallet several bank-notes large in number if not denomination, and of indifferent printing quality. “A decent hotel, if you please!” I commanded. I'd no intention of checking in, mind you, but I was in need of a shoeshine and the necessary information to orient myself.*

*In the hotel lobby, on my way to the bootblack's platform, I picked up a newspaper. Amid reports of a missing heiress in Graustark and civil war in Laurania on the continent, I found references to Royal Navy vessels attacked by an unknown undersea force, and the munitions ship HMS Ruthven gone mysteriously missing. Political editorials analyzed the latest dire pronouncement from Premier Citoyen Armand Chauvelin, de facto leader of the Committee of Public Safety and (according to the paper) therefore de facto ruler of post-revolutionary Poictesme. Fascinating.*

*The grim overseas news was overshadowed by the headline story, beneath a lurid illustration, which detailed a series of attacks upon women by a person or creature nicknamed Spring Heeled Jack.*

*I confess to being so distracted by that as I crossed the lobby I tripped over a leather medical bag next to a bench where two gentlemen sat. The taller of them leapt to my rescue. A hand that felt as if it were formed of bundled wires caught my shoulder, saving me from a fall. I offered thanks and apologized for my sudden intrusion. The shorter of the two gentlemen begged my pardon for being so careless with his belongings, and introduced himself as Dr. Ormond Sacker and his companion as Dr. Joseph Bell.*

*Regardless of the names he used, I recognized the tall man—Sherlock Holmes! Which made his companion Dr. Watson! I should explain in more detail. I was born, some while ago, on the Gossamer World known to its inhabitants as Earth. Yes, I know that there are many such. Do not feign naïveté; you know the Earth I mean. I've re-visited my home on various occasions, though less frequently in recent decades. Sadly, Paris is not what it once was. One of that world's most recognizable fictional character is undoubtedly Sherlock Holmes, the great detective. This man was he, to the life! No mere imposture; no actor could portray Holmes with such lack of affectation. Impossibly, he was real. But why was he going by a pseudonym?*

*His piercing eyes narrowed, and flicked down then up, taking me in from my shoes to my hat. “I perceive you have been lately near the Shadwell docks—and before that, upon the treads of the stairway that passes between worlds.”*

*I am seldom rendered speechless, but in all my life I have never been more so! He took advantage of the moment to continue.*



*"The mud and manure on your shoe sole are both found near Shadwell—Pilchard Street, most likely, since cabs are readily hired there. Your clothing is otherwise immaculate, and of a cut not commonly seen in the City. Your bearing is aristocratic, and your accent is undeniably Provençal. No continental language here has that particular lilt."*

*Taken aback, I did the best I could to match him deduction for deduction. "When we ran into one another just now, you took especial note of my shoes. Not the act of a random stranger. You're looking for him!" I gestured with the newspaper. "You think a Wa—a person from another world—is accosting these women?"*

*"More than just accosting," Watson said grimly. "The newspapers are being discrete, for once. His last victim, a woman going by the name of Irene Adler, was killed."*

*The man introduced as Dr. Bell frowned. "You, sir, would know more of otherworldly origins than I. Certainly our quarry is someone or something," he said, pronouncing the last syllable with evident distaste, "that is beyond ordinary human capacity. It leaps three stories in a bound, and produces goutts of blue sparks that can melt metal. Even here, such abilities are uncommon."*

*I was intrigued; so much so that I decided that I had a mystery of my own to solve. Not the mystery of the acrobatic attacker, whom I was sure Holmes could deal with in due course—I was faced with the mystery of how a fictional character was able to shake my hand!*

## Literarify Bent

I was abroad in a Gossamer World unlike any other I had previously experienced. Eventually, I dubbed it "Planet Fiction," because more imaginary persons than just Sherlock Holmes inhabited that place. During my travels, I encountered many people who were no more real than the great detective—except that they were demonstrably present in the flesh.

Some of those fictional people were aware, however peripherally, of the Grand Stair, having experienced it briefly when they came to Planet Fiction. Most come to some rationalization for their presence in a world different from that of their birth—and for the most part, they keep mum about it, lest they be thought insane. Others, like Holmes, had deduced or guessed far more, and lacked only the common parlance of those who travel the Stair. With it, they could easily be mistaken for Gossamer Lords themselves. A third category exists: people who are native to Planet Fiction, yet seem as outlandish as any character from literature. Their existence proves that some primal force is at work. Many Gossamer Worlds echo others, but something causes this particular Gossamer World to echo works of fiction from Gossamer Earth.

## Steam and Sorcery

As Holmes had determined, Planet Fiction is one of those Gossamer Worlds; places where just about anything works regardless of whether it's based upon scientific or mystical principles. What's worse, things work for the most dubious of reasons—if you can even get a scientist or a mage to explain it. A result, no doubt, of the place's varied fictional underpinnings.

With regard to science, the highest technologies I experienced while living there were an advanced form of steam-power and an equally advanced form of electro-motive propulsion. In comparison, the internal combustion engines common to many other Gossamer Worlds never had a chance. Instead of the reek of half-burned gasoline, the advanced cities of Planet Fiction are awash in stinking coal smoke. I can't say that it's much of an improvement.

The highest form of magic appears to be practiced in the least technologically advanced regions. Note that I say "technologically" not "scientifically"—there are places in Planet Fiction where the locals have extensive scientific literature and knowledge, but prefer their complex and potent magics over any technological geegaws. Among the Bronze Age city states, prophecy and sorcery are as matter-of-fact as any technology elsewhere.

It makes things complex for the foreign traveler; one is never certain how seriously to take a legend or tall tale concerning one's destination. Lighter-than-air craft carrying heavy artillery? Flying carpets, cursed oases, and blood-thirsty manticores? As a rule, I avoid such Worlds. How can one anticipate the perils that may await when virtually nothing can be disregarded as impossible? In Planet Fiction, the impossible is a daily, nay, an hourly occurrence. It's best to assume that everything one hears is true until proven false.

## The Lay of the Lands

Being by nature a man of inaction, I lingered in the City for some time after meeting the so-called Dr. Bell, pursuing my own investigation into the nature of Planet Fiction. I was among a people who had explored and colonized many parts of their globe, and maps were easily obtainable. It was a relief to discover that Planet Fiction is in fact a globe, and not one of the Gossamer Worlds of different structure. The landforms match roughly those of my home Gossamer World, Earth. The borders of the nations, however, differ markedly. I can but describe the regions in the approximate order in which I visited or heard of them, but in truth, the tale of Planet Fiction is not about the place—it's about the people I met there.



# Great Albion and the Continent

Positioned as it is in a similar climate to Earth's Europe, the Continent has equally-agreeable weather; warm in the south, along the shores of the Winedark Sea, and cooler elsewhere—although the island nation of Great Albion benefits from the effect of warm ocean currents, and suffers less seasonal variation than one might expect. The effect on fashion throughout the Continent is predictable; woolen and linen clothing abound. Gentlemen dress in trousers, shirts, and jackets, ladies wear long skirts with multiple crinolines. Everyone wears hats, according to one's station in life: gentlemen favor tall flat-crowned top hats, tradesmen and the middle classes wear domed hats with curled brims, and the poor wear soft cloth caps. Ladies' hats are as imaginative as their budgets allow, with flowers, feathers, and occasionally entire taxidermied songbirds attached. Poorer women must make do with scarves.

## Great Albion

The City, that great collection of smoky edifices, is the capitol of Great Albion, Planet Fiction's preeminent colonial power and yet another nation upon which "the sun does not set." As Continentals would have it, that's because God does not trust the Abionese in the dark.

The sprawling City stands astride a great river, making it Great Albion's principal port. Goods and travelers from many distant lands come to the City's docks. One cannot venture into that polyglot cacophony without encountering at least some small peril—if not to life and limb, at least to one's personal property. It's often worth the risk, however; the ships of Great Albion carry the goods of an entire world back to sate the appetites of the nation. Regardless of the nature of one's desires, bargains licit and otherwise are to be had if one knows where to look.

Even the efforts of the Great Detective cannot entirely rid the City of crime. From the palace of the Widow Queen down to the meanest dockside slums, vice and violence are the ever-present dark side of life in Great Albion. From upper-crust scofflaws and rakehells like the





Hell-Fire Club, down to the brutish underworld bullyrock known as Mister Hyde, criminality is not confined to what the Metropolitan Police refer to as the “criminal classes,” nor as they would have it, to foreigners—though I grant them their grudge against the latter; the continental master thief Arsène Lupin remains beyond their grasp despite having a publicly-known identity. Even to an outsider, it is apparent that crime in the City is organized. There is an unmistakable air of methodical precision that can only mean that a brilliant, if twisted, mastermind is behind it all. Even within the underworld, no one knows the name of that mastermind, but Holmes is certain that it is his nemesis, Professor Moriarty.

Venturing outside the City, Great Albion is decidedly rural. It is an island nation of small hamlets and quaint little towns, punctuated on occasion by a manor house or crumbling castle. The northern districts are home to low, time-worn mountains and windswept heaths, while in the south green forests and fields give way either to fens or rocky chalk cliffs along the coast. According to Holmes, each town and stately country home has its own peculiar folklore and a dark secret or two hiding behind the scenes. From rampaging highland hellhounds to the mysterious Jack in the Green who waylays travelers crossing the great forests, rural Albion is, if anything, more hazardous to life and health than the City.

*Toward the end of my stay in the City there was a brief commotion when a pair of giant scorpions was loosed into the City's dockside districts, having stowed away in a cargo of porcelain from far-off Jingshan. Killing them with fire caused a conflagration among the warehouses and cost me the material door linked to the Door I had used to enter Planet Fiction. Watson proposed that the scorpions were part of the evil machinations of some Eastern master-villain, but Holmes scoffed at the idea. “As if Professor Moriarty would allow such an intrusion upon his territory!” Probably correct; then again, Holmes has always had a bee in his bonnet when it comes to that gentleman. Had I not already been drawn in by the charms of Planet Fiction, I might have realized that the loss of the Door was hardly accidental.*

*Taking refuge from “The Affair of the Scorpions” at the Pickwick Club, I chanced to meet a Continental gentleman of some apparent means. Over brandy we discussed the alarming political situation on the Continent, and he invited me to visit his native country. With a mystery still to pursue, I embarked the following day for Giens alongside my new friend, Fritz von Tarlenheim, a quite remarkable fellow.*

## Poictesme

In centuries past, the kingdom of Poictesme was a grand and glorious place. Above the docks at Giens the royal banners—sable, emblazoned with a stallion argent—once waved above the carved motto “*Mundus*

*vult decipi?*”—The World Wants to be Deceived. Those banners are long gone now, torn down and replaced with the revolutionary flag of the Committee of Public Safety, banded red over blue—the red blood of common citizens over the fresh-spilt blue blood of aristocrats.

Giens, Poictesme's principal port, has seen better days. The recent revolution was not kind to the once-thriving city; revolutionary sentiment did not take kindly to accumulations of wealth, nor to those who accumulated them. Now, the formerly thriving docks are home to any number of spies, scoundrels, and Public Safety informers looking for escaping aristocrats. Von Tarlenheim and I put red and blue revolutionary cockades on our hats, and kept those hats pulled low as we traveled the alleys and byways of the port.

A network of coaches and coach-road inns links the cities of Poictesme with one another, and with those neighboring nations that are still willing to conduct commerce with the troubled new Republic. Poictesme's countryside fared better than her cities; fields, vineyards, and orchards spread to either side of the coach-road as we traveled. It seemed idyllic and peaceful, but travelers are still advised to take pains to disguise their foreign origins when passing through. Foreigners are not welcomed in modern Poictesme; they're considered to be spies, *agents provocateur*, or worse.

Inland, past Gontaron and the Forest of Acaire lies the capitol, Storisende. Built in kinder times at the joining of the Duardanez and Ardre rivers, Storisende is no longer the seat of kings, but rather the stronghold of the Committee of Public Safety, and its First Citizen, Armand Chauvelin. As ruthless as they come, Chauvelin's patriotic fervor for his new Republic of Poictesme is limitless—as is his ambition.

Storisende itself survived the revolution architecturally intact, but her many palaces, along with her great salons and museums, were looted by the mobs. Economically, the city has fallen on hard times. The new currency, unbacked by the wealth of the Royal Estates, is suffering outrageous inflation—meaning that the peasants and burghers of Storisende suffer as well. Businesses and shops are boarded shut in many streets, and the price of bread is dear. The great, gray bastion of the central prison, on an island mid-way across the Duardanez, is one location still doing a brisk business. The nation's nobility, their lands forfeit to the new government, are dragged there in chains. In the grand forecourt of the Royal Palace, where once proud soldiers drilled, crowds now gather daily to watch heads roll as aristocrats sentenced to death by the Committee of Public Safety face execution by guillotine. Above that gory plaza, bells tolled by a capering hunchback announce the tally



of rolling heads. Storisende is a city gripped by terror, where no one, no matter how loyal to the Republic, is truly safe. Chauvelin's paranoia sees to that.

If *Premier Citoyen* Chauvelin has a rival, it is Miramon Lluagor, The Lord of Nine Sleeps and Prince of Seven Madnesses. He is a powerful immortal mage who lives atop Mount Vraidex, highest peak of the Taunenfels Mountains just north of the capitol. Unseen now for many decades, according to legend he provides dreams for all who live in Poictesme. In the ancient past, he granted the legendary sword Flamberge to the equally legendary first Count of Poictesme, Manuel, who founded the royal house whose descendants now go by cart, one by one, to the guillotine. Why Miramon Lluagor has sent no nightmares—nor creatures pieced together from nightmares—to *Citoyen* Chauvelin, I do not know.

*My friend von Tarlenheim attempted to entice me into some scheme of his, in which I was to impersonate a masked swordsman known for rescuing condemned aristocrats from the guillotine. Apparently, I bear this fellow a passing resemblance. Von Tarlenheim's intention was that I lead the gendarmerie forces on a merry chase through the streets of Storisende, while his crusading friend with the flowery nickname absconded with two noblewomen before they could be beheaded. I demurred, however, reasoning that if noblewomen were to be absconded with, I would do the absconding.*

*In the ensuing confusion, von Tarlenheim and I became separated. I felt myself fortunate to have made it over the border into neighboring Graustark with my head still attached.*

## Graustark

Graustark is a tiny nation, no more than eight hundred square miles all told, and most of that vertiginously mountainous. A railway line takes one to the only notable city: the capitol, Edelweiss. It's a lovely town, with steep cobbled streets and gaudily-painted buildings. Their shingled roofs are sharply inclined, to shed the winter snow which drifts deeply here for many months of the year. The people of Edelweiss enjoy the brief summers of Graustark in many small but beautifully manicured parks scattered throughout their city.

Edelweiss is built on a mountainside; the city's highest elevations run right up into the clouds. Castle Avenue, the main thoroughfare, runs from the lowest outskirts up countless switchbacks to the royal palace—and beyond it to the very peak of the mountain, capped with the gray-black stones of a grim and forbidding-looking monastery. By contrast, the medieval fortress of the rulers of Graustark, with its massive, ivy-covered walls and high turreted towers, seems quite inviting, since it is set in a broad terrace of parkland that was once, long ago, a wide moat.

In its past, Graustark had been warlike, her princes bent upon foreign conquest. They could afford aggression; their native mountains provided them an almost unassailable defensive position, should fortune ever favor their enemies. Eventually fortune did, and after the Axpahin War Graustark was forced to pay a large indemnity in order to secure a peace treaty. Subsequently, Graustarkian culture became much more peace-loving.

Although the royal house of Graustark remains chronically in debt, they seem to manage from generation to generation by marrying off heirs and heiresses to foreign personages with money. Each such marriage, and its attendant influx of capital, keeps the nation solvent for a few more years.

*At the Edelweiss railway station, I spent some implausible number of garvo, the local coinage, to obtain a ticket to Ruritania, where I hoped to find out if von Tarlenheim had made it out of Poictesme alive.*

*Aboard the train, I found myself in the company of a charming young woman named Essanay. She was neatly and primly dressed in the Graustark fashion, and her jet black tresses were cut in a short bob. Had I the abrupt manner of my friend Holmes, I would have mentioned my observation that her hair had been recently dyed to its current color; her eyebrows were a much lighter auburn. As our train wound through mountain passes and crossed deep river gorges on narrow trestle bridges, approaching the Ruritanian border, Essanay seemed more and more distracted—and not by the glorious view.*

*At the border, our train was boarded by soldiers of the Graustark Royal Guard, their gilded helmets burnished to a fine lustre. They spoke to no one, but examined every ticket and every piece of luggage thoroughly. As I was traveling without luggage, they gave me more scrutiny than most of the other passengers. Essanay took advantage of the distraction I provided, and vanished from the train.*

## Ruritania

Entering the deep forests of lowland Ruritania, the rail line runs through Strackenz, Zenda (barely more than a village, though boasting a fine and ancient fortress), and finally Strelsau, the capital.

Strelsau is a mix of old architecture and new. Spacious modern streets and residential neighborhoods of recent construction enwrap the tortuously narrow (if picturesque) streets of the Old Town. The Grand Boulevard cuts through many of those streets, leading to a great square where the Royal Palace stands, bedecked with banners displaying the Red Rose of the ruling Elphberg dynasty. The Royal Palace, thanks to the vicissitudes of urban growth and decay, is not in the center of the city; that location, the city's oldest





neighborhood, is also its least desirable, where poverty-stricken citizens reside cheek-by-jowl with criminals and would-be revolutionaries.

Ruritanian fashion is remarkably similar to that of Great Albion, if a bit more colorful. Of particular note, Ruritanian gentlemen of importance civilian and military alike favor bright silk or satin sashes worn from right shoulder to left hip, upon which are embroidered or pinned a great variety of symbolic insignia and medals. Ladies of the upper classes wear wide-skirted, off-the-shoulder gowns in a truly dazzling array of colors and fabrics, although, it must be said, that feminine fashion tends to the eminently practical on some occasions. A Ruritanian woman indulging in the national pastime of hunting will wear sturdy trousers and a shooting jacket (tailored of course), just as certainly as would her male companions.

*In Strelsau, much to my relief, I reunited with a recuperating von Tarlenheim. The daughters of the Vicomte de Bragelonne were safely ensconced at the Percy estate in Great Albion, and he was in a mood to celebrate our success, crutches be damned!*

*At the dinner party we attended in Strelsau, the gossip was all about the Crown Princess of Graustark, missing from Edelweiss for the past several weeks. She had disappeared immediately after her betrothal to a foreign dignitary. I am above petty gossip, and kept my mouth firmly shut when the topic was broached. Essanay, whatever her real name might be, deserved as much of a head start as I could give her.*

## Gérolstein

East of Ruritania, where the land levels out into sweeping steppes that reach the far horizon, lays Gérolstein, where summers are hot and winters dry and frigid. The wind-blown plains of Gérolstein are broken by a few raw hills and the rare town or settlement. The new capitol, Malacovia, is near the bottomless Lake Cernovic, six days travel by train from Strelsau. East of Malacovia, the land is even more sparsely inhabited, and full of dire tales of witchcraft and misadventure.

Originally styled the Grand Duchy of Gérolstein, the last Grand Duchess was deposed in a violent coup thirty years ago when General Dragan Zivkov seized power. The firebird ensign was torn down, and the Grand Duchess and all her family were executed by firing squad—although rumors persist that her youngest son, Dmitri, escaped. Periodically, a lost heir pops up in some neighboring nation, claimant to the crown of Gérolstein. Real or not, they don't tend to survive for long. The efforts of Security Minister Koschei's secret police see to that.

Three sisters, all powerful witches, roam the steppes of central Gérolstein. Sumska Majka is the eldest, Ježibaba the middle sister, and Baba Yaga the youngest. They all have fearsome reputations for cannibalism. Baba Yaga, in particular, favors the flesh of young children.





The witches' homes are not found in fixed locations, since they are magical huts with chicken legs. These bizarre dwellings can run at great speed, and can leap extraordinary distances. Both General Zivkov and his lick-spittle Koschei have tried repeatedly to enlist the services of one or more of the sisters, but they remain aloof. They were not supporters of the late Grand Duchess either, but perhaps they value the old traditions of the Grand Duchy over General Zivkov's social "innovations."

Gérolstein, even in earlier days, was a military power, but General Zivkov has spent the state treasury nearly bankrupt building up a powerful and modern army—and an air force. Unique (at present) on the continent, General Zivkov's mechanized divisions and motorcycle-cavalry are ideal for traversing the wide plains, their gray banners streaming behind them. His fleet of rigid-hulled airships, each emblazoned with the single red feather that symbolizes the new Gérolstein rising from the ashes of the old, can bomb without warning from great altitudes.

The border forts of Gérolstein, in anticipation of enemy bombing, are almost entirely subterranean, with walls and turrets which retract using cunning arrangements of gears and steam-power, leaving only their sloping earth glacis above ground. Zivkov's troops garrison each fortification, as Gérolstein prepares for war on an unprecedented scale.

General Zivkov's new capitol, Malacovia, although built upon marshy land near a bottomless lake, is the greatest fortress of them all. The entire city is enclosed within an iron dome bristling with cannons. Via clockwork and steam, the whole city-fortress can be made to descend into a massive granite ring constructed to keep the swampland—and invading armies—at bay.

## Transylvania

Transylvania is not a nation, per se, rather it is a region—one of dense forests, sharp mountain peaks, and fast-flowing icy rivers. The people of Transylvania are said to be hearty folk, if clannish and suspicious of strangers. Their suspicions are often well-founded; any number of *voivodes*, which literally translates as "warlords," maintain fortified residences and castles among the crags. The people from the next village down the road are likely beholden to a potential enemy.

Neighboring nations view the Transylvanian peasantry as being backward and ill-educated; this is not untrue, but neither is it the fault of the people. The voivodes keep their subjects that way on purpose. Hereditary nobility from ages past, their treatment of the peasantry is positively medieval. The unsavory practices and cruel punishments of Transylvania's Counts and Barons is legendary.



*My charming dinner party companion in Strelsau told me all I needed to know of Transylvania. "My dear Baron," she began, (I was using the pseudonym Munchausen at the time) "we don't cross the border into Transylvania if it can be avoided." Her voice became a throaty whisper. "Count Dracula is a vampire, or so they say."*

*I could find no reason to doubt the lady's claim—and even less reason to test it.*

## Siebenbürgen

Beyond Transylvania lies wraith-haunted Siebenbürgen, a land of rolling hills and deep forests. It is not a united nation, rather a collection of tiny Duchies and Principalities united by a common language and divided by matters of religion. Von Tarlenheim told me that if all of Siebenbürgen were to somehow unite they would become a force to be reckoned with. It is just such an occurrence that occupies the mind of Gérolstein's General Zivkov. Although the entire region seems something of a rural backwater to anyone who has experienced the City, Siebenbürgen boasts a number of fine universities, and at least one eminent scientist—a Dr. Victor Frankenstein, who has revolutionized galvanic theory or somesuch.

The climate of Siebenbürgen is brisk even in summer, and the snows lay deep upon the ground in winter. The people there wear fur as a matter of course; fur collars, fur-lined hoods and boots, and thick fur caps are the height of fashion. By contrast, indoors the Siebenbürgers practice a casual near-nudity that would be scandalous elsewhere on the Continent. Mixed-gender saunas are a feature of every social occasion, along with the imbibing of a particularly fiery liquor. I continue to find it amazing that such a friendly and open people could harbor so many dark secrets.

*The Household troops of Prince Varna wear pelisses cut from wolf pelts over their dark red uniform jackets. Through a small misadventure, I discovered the true purpose of those pelts, and exited Siebenbürgen pursued by wolves. Unwilling to assay Transylvania and unable for political reasons to re-enter Poictesme, I elected to leave the continent by a southwesterly route.*

## Altamira

Altamira is a peninsula extending southwest of Poictesme into the ocean. Its climate is warm and dry—a welcome change from the damp chill of foggy Siebenbürgen. The Altamirans prefer to live near the coast, where the roads are better and the market towns plentiful and comfortably spaced a day's ride apart. The peninsula boasts half a dozen small kingdoms, most of whom are perpetually at war with one another

over slights of touchy Altamiran honor. They all hug the coasts, however, leaving the dry, central highlands nearly uninhabited—at least by humans. Those hills and plains of ochre earth punctuated by clumps of sage green vegetation are instead the adopted homes of great four-armed giants, horrid creatures belched forth by the oceans aeons ago. They are devourers of men, and the undisputed rulers of the high country. Few humans have ever encountered them at close range, fewer still have lived—and none at all have learned the truth behind their abhorrence of mankind.

*In retrospect, short-cutting across the interior of the peninsula, away from settled lands, was perhaps ill-advised. It must have slumbered, if such creatures do, and roused at my approach. Big as a house, but so conical in form as to seem squat and somehow stunted, the beast had four great arms ropey with muscles—the better to pound me into butter! Its first strike sent me flying and tore the head from my horse. Its second narrowly missed killing me before I could even draw my sword. The Eidolon offered me scant protection, and for all its lumbering bulk the giant before me was lightning-quick.*

*I fought for my life, ducking sweeping blows of those massive arms. My Ruritanian rapier, even reinforced by the power of the Eidolon, was all but useless. Suddenly, I heard a cry: "Bless Saint James, and strike for Altamira!" A half-dozen armored knights topped the ridge ahead, the last rays of the setting sun shining from their bright armor and streaming banners! Like a chevron of flying hooves and gleaming lance-points, the knights drove into the monstrous thing at a full gallop! Their lances glowed with silver light as they struck the monstrosity, opening a full half-dozen great wounds upon it. Shrieking, long arms whirling and flailing ineffectually, it died.*

*The leader of the knights, slender in his antique steel shell, slid from his destrier and swept a low bow in my direction. "Don Alonso Quixote, of the Knights of La Mancha, at your service!" He said, removing his helmet as he rose to his full height. His hair was wild and white, his face seamed with lines, but his eyes were clear and blue, and his grin fiercely joyful.*

*As we made camp—at some distance from the noxious-smelling corpse—Don Quixote spoke. "The enchantress Urganda la Desconocida granted us our lances, invincible in the hands of a true and chivalrous knight." His teeth flashed white in the firelight. "Ah, what my friends back home would say, to see me with such fine companions! Sir Amadis! Present this fine fellow with your lance; he fought well—let us see his spirit!" One of the knights stepped forward, bowed, and handed me his lance. The lance head remained dull iron in my grasp. "Ah, I see..." said Don Quixote, suddenly showing his age. Thereafter, as the Knights of La Mancha escorted me to Portaga on the western shore, the hidalgo remained polite, but never again favored me with that fierce grin.*



## Portaga

One of many Altamiran kingdoms, Portaga is the one to stir the soul of any seafarer. Tall-masted ships lay at anchor in her harbors, sharing space with steam-powered vessels out of Great Albion and Bruggezwin. A great variety of seafood are taken by Portaga's fishing fleet, making the Portagan cuisine a gastronomist's delight. The local wines are equally excellent, and far more exportable; Portagan vintages are found across the continent, and sometimes in even more distant lands.

The climate of the Altamiran peninsula is nowhere as hot and dry as in Portaga. The presence of the great ocean off shore provides a cool breeze each evening, and sufficient moisture to allow for civilized life, but during the heat of mid-day the people remain indoors, either napping or indulging in other non-strenuous pastimes. It is in the evening that Portaga comes alive, when musicians and dancers fill the cafes and the complex and compelling melodies of the local twelve-stringed *gitar*s fill the air.

*Over local wine in a dockside bar, I fell in with some smartly-dressed sailors from a vessel belonging to a Prince Dakkar, a foreign potentate of apparent wealth. They told me that their vessel was currently operating short-handed, many of the polyglot crew having been set to another task by the prince. They suggested that I might therefore arrange working passage back to Great Albion, where the Prince had some unfinished business. I toasted my good fortune with my new friends. Repeatedly.*

*I awoke, head throbbing, in a narrow bunk. The stateroom was well—if compactly—appointed, and designed for double occupancy. There was another bunk above my own, to which my wrists were shackled. My wine had obviously been drugged. Fortunately, my captors underestimated my metabolism—it takes a truly prodigious amount of anything to keep me unconscious for long. Slipping the shackles caused me little difficulty. The locked stateroom door caused me even less. The happy thought occurred to me that if the vessel I was on did not boast a brig, perhaps its crew was unaccustomed to taking prisoners.*

*Upon further consideration, that was not necessarily a happy thought.*

*My attempts at stealth went unrewarded in the narrow confines below decks. Uniformed crewmen conducted me politely but firmly into a sumptuously decorated salon that obviously doubled as the ship's dining hall. The sonorous tones of organ music accompanied my entrance from the far end of the windowless chamber. The organist reached the climax of the movement, and turned to face me. He was a striking, dark-complected man with a forked black beard, a straight nose, and wide-set black eyes.*

*"Welcome aboard the Nautilus. My crew took you for a wealthy and foolish Albionese tourist, and thought it might amuse me to hold you for ransom. Obviously, you are no more Albionese than I. What you actually are remains to be seen." He smoothed his dark blue jacket, absently tracing the gold embroidered "N" with one perfectly-manicured finger. "I must inconvenience you a while longer, however. Our course is already set, and I have an appointment I must keep, beyond the Maelstrom."*

## Beyond the Maelstrom

Prince Dakkar's globe and charts told the tale. One cannot sail westward out of the Winedark Sea and into the great ocean beyond; the Maelstrom blocks the way. It is a great whirlpool at the narrows of the sea's western extreme, where Altamira and the desert lands of Al-Maghrib almost touch. The currents there are unnavigable by any ship afloat. Prince Dakkar possesses the only vessel capable of surviving the Maelstrom, allowing him to use the Winedark Sea as a safe haven—which brings me at last to the nature of Prince Dakkar's most peculiar conveyance.

The *Nautilus* is a submarine! Powered by ingenious electrical engines, it is equipped with every comfort, including a steam-powered pipe organ. The *Nautilus* can recycle air, distill drinkable water from the sea, and sustain its crew of forty for up to five days at a time without surfacing. It is a masterpiece containing masterpieces, testament to the genius of its inventor, the Prince—or, as he prefers the surface world to know and fear him, Captain Nemo.

*The prospect of sailing the submarine through a vortex like the Maelstrom and into the calmer sea beyond filled me with dread. As an unwilling passenger for the enterprise, I could do nothing but stand at a porthole and tremble. I attempted to distract myself by mulling over something the Captain had told me.*

*According to Captain Nemo, he piloted the Nautilus through the Maelstrom from Gossamer Earth. Is the Maelstrom then something like a Door, or does it conceal a Door? That raises other questions, which have plagued my mind from time to time; why is the entirety of the Grand Stair suitable for me and mine? The height of the ceilings (when there are ceilings), the width of the hallways, the very pitch of the treads—not to mention the gravity, temperature, and the very air itself—all seem designed for the comfort of humans. Could there be other parts of the Stair suited for other creatures? For creatures that breathe water, or don't breathe at all; creatures big enough to require Doors that can pass a submarine?*

*Distracting myself in this fashion proved less calming than I had hoped.*

*The coiling streams of bubbles outside the Nautilus' foot-thick portholes, the straining throb of her electric engines, and the sudden, turbulent shifts in her course told me that Nemo and his crew were in a life and death struggle with the Maelstrom, but to look at that darkly impassive face one would never know it. Safely passing the gigantic whirlpool, our Captain celebrated his success by surfacing, and allowing the Nautilus' skeleton crew and I some time on deck in the sunlight.*





## Across the Winedark Sea

South of the continent lies an inland sea, dotted with islands of such heartbreaking beauty that one can hardly muster the will to leave one for another, and each is more intriguing than the last. Great cities and tiny whitewashed villages cling to land at the very edge of the indigo sea, beneath a brilliant sky.

Among the islands, each a city state unto itself, biremes and triremes ply the merchant trade unaffected by the steamships of the great ocean beyond the Maelstrom. Each city state stands proudly alone, though they share a common language and culture. The islands of the Winedark Sea have a rich oral tradition, and a vast number of songs and poems tell epic tales of the deeds of their many gods and heroes. Heracles, immortal demi-god that he is, rules a city state to this day. It may be the influence of various immortal folk that keep the questionable benefits of “progress” at bay among the islands. The only people more set in their ways than immortals are the gods themselves.

The islands of the Winedark Sea are fiercely polytheistic, and each resident honors at least a handful of the members of the main pantheon, alongside syncretic deities blended together from many traditions. The bare-breasted priestesses of the Serpent Goddess would scandalize the residents of Great Albion—but then again, the smoke-belching trains crisscrossing that nation would hardly meet the approval of the people of Mykenos or Tiryns, either.

## Mykenos

Mykenos is a sprawling port city, wrapped around half the coast of her home island. A pair of wide artificial breakwaters curves out on either side of the port, enclosing it. A net of bronze chains stretches from the fortresses at each end, which can be drawn taut to block access. They wouldn’t stop the *Nautilus*, or even a Great Ocean steamship—but they’ll stop anything Mykenos’ enemies can put to sea.

The philosophers of Mykenos know of steam generation, but they do not use it for propulsion. They come by their knowledge naturally: volcanic vents on the island give it an abundance of hot springs. Local craftsmen are masters of using simple machines for complex ends. The hand-filed brass gears of their navigational instruments, timepieces, and eclipse-predictors rival the work of the best watchmakers of Graustark—albeit somewhat larger in size, and even dearer in price.

Above the city’s busy streets, atop a sculpted cliff, lies the ruler’s palace; a great edifice of white stone, fronted with strong, red-painted cedar pillars. The vast three-story structure boasts spring-fed baths, steamrooms,



counterweight-operated doors, and a throne room walled with purest white marble. Mykenos is a sea-faring power, and that is reflected in the azure and turquoise frieze of waves around the exterior of the palace walls. Sculpted dolphins flank each doorway in honor of the gods of the sea—but within the palace, the presence of carved bull's heads and curling paired serpents show that the people revere other deities as well.

Those bull's heads may have a darker significance: tales are told of a complex labyrinth beneath the palace, where the great Minotaur Asterion lurks. Asterion is a prince of Mykenos, born half-man, half-bull as a curse upon his royal parents for their lack of piety.

Mykenos controls several colony-cities on nearby islands, forming the beginnings of an empire. They expand not by warfare, but by trade. Canny merchants travel the Winedark Sea, their chitons and tunics pinned at the shoulder with gold ornaments bearing the blue wave of Mykenos.

### Ptolemais

The walls of the city-state of Ptolemais seem less achingly white than those of other islands. Perhaps it is the gauzy black draperies that conceal the windows, or the tarnished brass fittings of the dark wooden doors. Or perhaps it is the stifling and oppressive atmosphere pervading that grim island. The people of Ptolemais huddle in their coastal city and at all costs avoid the Plains of Helusion in the interior, at the furthest reach of the Charonean canal. Something of Shadow dwells there, amid the graven mausolea. Perhaps it is the spectre of the tens of thousands of Ptolemaian dead sent down the canal in funerary boats and thereafter forgotten.

### Iolaea

Iolaea, that mighty walled citadel, is a city state perched on a high rock jutting out from the sea. Its ruler is the immortal demigod Heracles, who built the fortress himself stone by stone to honor the memory of his fallen chariot-driver Iolaus. The people of Iolaea are peaceful, but they give their ruler a wide berth, for Heracles' anger and rages are as mighty as his mirth. More than once he has sought to test his strength against Asterion's in personal combat, but the King of Mykenos blocks all such efforts.

### Tiryns

Tiryns is not one city, but many. Each of the small coves and harbors along the island's shore once hosted separate villages. Over the centuries, the villages grew together into Tiryns, which sprawls in a narrow band





for miles along the coast. The wealth of Tiryns comes from those shallow coves; there and there alone are found the tiny sea creatures that the people of Tiryns harvest to make purple dye. It is exquisitely beautiful, and exquisitely expensive.

It is to Tiryns one must travel if one wishes to ask a question of the Oracle, Cassandra. In her high temple, she is the final authority in Tiryns, standing in for the absentee Prince Pericles. Famous throughout the world, Cassandra's prophecies are said to be always true, but never believed.

Atop a high cliff above the crashing sea lies the great circular temple, surrounded by four dozen marble pillars. Its gold-burnished dome has a central hole from which a delicate thread of vapor wafts. Few have the temerity to come to that lonely place and brave the Sibyls and Maenads who protect their mistress. Fewer still dare to ask Cassandra what the future holds.

*Naturally, it was Cassandra with whom Captain Nemo had his appointment. Graciously, he permitted me to accompany him to the temple. Surrounded by wild-haired Maenads, I waited as Nemo approached the dais upon which the oracle reclined. He leaned close, breathing the same smoke as Cassandra, and murmured a question in her delicate ear. From long conversations in his salon, I knew that Nemo planned some potent act of vengeance against Great Albion, but he had vouchsafed to me no details. Perhaps he was here seeking some intimation of future success? I could only guess.*

*Cassandra exhaled smoke, and whispered. "The fire you spark across the sea will not ignite a nation, nor bring down a crown in flames."*

*Beard bristling, Nemo demanded to be shown a clearer vision. I would swear that the black smoke from the brazier pressed back against the Oracle by the sheer force of his will alone—and I saw Cassandra raise a magical barrier in response! Delicate as crystal lace, it fended off Nemo's blunt assault. I recognized that Cassandra had some knowledge of the Eidolon—those trceries were too precise to be anything else. It followed, then, that Nemo was beginning to exert the Power of Umbra! How had he learned of such things? Or did his passage to this World somehow grant him that ability?*

*Nemo was in such a state of temper that he failed to note (until it was too late) that I had not returned with him to the Nautilus. Instead I chanced upon a vessel different from the dromons and pentekonteres common to the port of Tiryns. This vessel was lateen-rigged and, although obviously a merchantman, had the sleek lines of a fast ship. I booked passage quickly, neither asking nor caring where she was headed. I only hoped that it was a different destination than Captain Nemo's.*

*Her reis, or captain, was named Es-Sindibad, and I recognized in him the same wanderlust which led me through my first Door. He was also quite the raconteur, and entertained me throughout our voyage with tales of his prior exploits. Like my own, a few of them might actually have been true.*

## Southern Lands

South of the Winedark Sea lies a vast continent. Its northernmost part is a land of sweeping deserts, the Al-Maghrib, and further south it becomes a land of sweltering jungles. Both are home to kingdoms and nations of fabled wealth, sources of gold, silver, sandalwood, precious gems, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

### Al-Maghrib

Fierce nations of nomads roam the Al-Maghrib, trading with and occasionally raiding their more settled brethren in the lands of the Caliph. Among those fabled cities there are many great sultans, which is the local term for "king," but only a single caliph. The caliph is no emperor, ruling above the lords of the realm; instead he is a religious figure whom all revere—but not all obey.

Of all the regions of Planet Fiction, the Al-Maghrib may be the one most beset by magical forces. Djinni, jann, ghuls, and other powerful supernatural creatures abound. Local sorcery is as easy to invoke as it is difficult (and dangerous) to master. Flying carpets, animate scimitars, enchanted ropes, and unguents of invisibility are not in short supply—but they always have unexpected side-effects.

The lands of the fabled Sultan Shahryar are rich beyond even my own dreams of avarice, exporting dates, oranges, spices, incense, and high-spirited horses to distant nations. In trade they take gold coins and silver beads, resinous Mykenos wines, and books—as many books as they can acquire. All of which go to the ever-growing library belonging to the Sultana, Scheherazade. Although she is accounted a great beauty, the Sultana is seldom seen by the populace. She spends most of her time either reading of far-away and magical lands, or telling Shahryar tales of such places.

*It was in a bazaar in the Caliph's holy city that I met Ala' ad-Din, a young man with almond eyes and a penchant for acquiring the contents of other peoples' pockets. Having had a look at the contents of mine, he took me for a sorcerer traveling in disguise, and became impossible to elude. He was not the local guide I would have chosen, but he proved a well of knowledge nonetheless.*

*My new and somewhat nefarious companion told me that the Sultana's Library had been built in a great cavern that had once been the treasure-board of a band of outlaws, forty strong, who terrorized travelers in the region before mighty Shahryar's ascent to the throne. And as it happened, he'd once robbed a merchant who knew the way in.*

*Ordinary doors are no barrier to such as we, but I indulged Ala' ad-Din. He spoke the nonsense password—"sesame," of all things—that triggered the spell. The massive wheel-door rolled aside, propelled no doubt by some invisible jann, and we slipped inside the secret library.*



The Sultana's library is an extraordinary collection of imaginative literature. The works of Wells and Verne and Doyle, books by Mary Shelley, scrolls penned by Buti Zhuanren, and many others besides crowd the endless rows of shelves within the cavern. All the languages of Gossamer Earth are represented, throughout the ages. Every repository of information shows great internal complexity when viewed through the lens of the Eidolon, but this library is of another order entirely. Taken as a whole, it is a construct of considerable potency. Some very powerful force is responsible for the presence of the fiction of Gossamer Earth in this faraway place—and that force is extremely protective of its treasures!

Although the Sultana can come and go freely, any other person intruding into the cavern is dealt with quickly and severely by its unseen guardian. Surviving such an encounter is certainly a mark of distinction, and anyone who does survive realizes as they are nursing their wounds that the defender of the Sultana's library is no product of local sorcery. Jann and djinni manipulate Gossamer matter with great facility, but they cannot call upon the Eidolon, and certainly not with potency capable of defeating a Master of that Power.

*Ala' ad-Din was not an entirely unpleasant companion during my convalescence, merely an inconvenient one. Finally I took advantage of his belief that he was now a sorcerer's apprentice to send him on an errand that would keep him occupied until I was long gone from the lands of the Caliph—and the lands of whatever being we'd angered in the secret library! I told him that since he had proved proficient at spelunking, I needed him to fetch a magic lamp from a cave I'd heard Es-Sindibad speak of. The boy was quite resourceful; I'm sure no lasting harm came to him.*

## Ophir

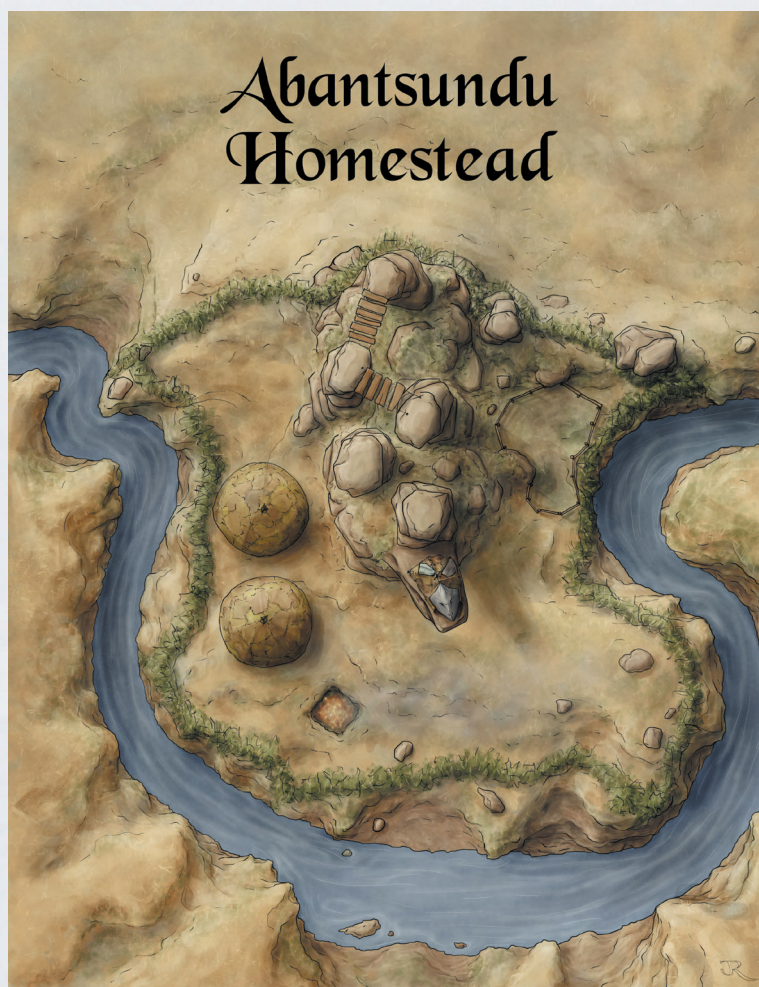
Beyond the great desert glistens Ophir, Jewel of the South, her many-storied towers surrounded by a mighty wall. The shining city is built upon the ancient catacombs of ruined Kôr, itself the seat of power of a former empire of serpent-men. The wealth of Ophir's decadent nobles is said to come by secret caravan from mines deep within the Saphir Mountains, eked out by the forced labor of cruelly-treated prisoners. Ayesha, the eternally-young Veiled Queen of Ophir, is

famed across many lands both for her beauty and for her capriciousness. I suspect that Ayesha, whoever she is, is an initiate of some Power or other—what else explains her apparent immortality?

The armies of Ophir, armed with spears and swords of bronze, range across half a continent seizing land, valuables, and, most importantly, prisoners to work in the Queen's gold mines. The Ophiri legions have a reputation for heartlessness, and are very efficient at breaking the spirits of captives. Attempts to escape are punished by mutilation; death is, after all, the most final form of escape.

## Urewe

South of Ophir, beyond the Saphir Mountains lays the land of Urewe. Dry savanna stretches for miles, relieved only by small lakes and springs. Many lakes here are seasonal, drying up completely in the hottest months of summer, but becoming oasis-like clusters of vegetation and animal life during the wet season. Cattle, zebras, and a variety of antelope species inhabit the savannas, preyed upon by wolves, hyenas, and lions.





The people of the grasslands call themselves the Abantsundu. They have a complex culture; family is important to them, and extended family groups are the heart of their society more than any notion of tribe or nation. Most extended families live in homesteads arranged in circular fashion around a central cattle pen, sometimes surrounded by a dense thicket of well-tended thorn bushes to fend away predators.

Among the Abantsundu, men are herders, tanners, smiths, and warriors; women are farmers, potters, weavers, and scholars. Abantsundu lore is passed down in the form of poetry and song, and extends back many generations. Like the poets of Mykenos and Tiryns, the lore-keepers of Urewe can recite for hours—sometimes days—relying on memory alone.

The Abantsundu people honor heroes and those who provide wise counsel. They are less interested in matters of formal rulership, relying upon consensus instead. The acknowledged King of Urewe, when a king is needed, is Umslopogaas of the Axe.

Umslopogaas is widely regarded as a mighty warrior and a wise decision-maker. This great hero of the Urewe nation is, they say, not of this World, having come from elsewhere to save Urewe from the predations of mighty Ophir. He and his beloved Queen, Nada the Lily, are legendary; I suspect that a study of their legend would reveal somewhere within it the presence of a Door.

## The Silk Road

The Silk Road out of Ophir is a hard path to travel, through mountains and skirting the edge of a mighty desert. Caravans pass along it, carrying goods from far away to trade for Ophir's gold. Spices and sandalwood, of course, and sometimes slaves, but the trade route gets its name from the delicate cloth that comes from far-off secretive Chang'an.

*Sixteen days into that journey, I chanced upon a startling sight; a giant toad battling for its life against an enormous serpent, while a delicate young woman looked on, seemingly paralyzed by fear! The serpent achieved a deadly hold, coiling about the toad's distended throat. The girl shouted "Jiraiya, no!" and I loosened my blade in its sheath, unsure of how best to come to her aid. Such a reaction is atypical of me, but the solemn judgment of my character by Don Quixote had apparently stung me more than I'd realized. Then the girl transformed into a gigantic semi-transparent slug, and half-drowned the serpent in her copious slime. Heroics on my part were unneeded.*

*The serpent retreated, and both toad and slug returned to their human forms, introducing themselves to me as Jiraiya and Tsunade. These odd folk were all as foreign to the mountains as I was. The pair of them were on a quest to redeem the soul of Jiraiya's enemy (and former student) Orochimaru the serpent-sorcerer. As we traveled, Tsunade told me a bit about their mutual homeland, a chain of islands off the distant coast, called Koryo-no-Shima.*

## Koryo-no-Shima

It sounded like a beautiful country, though much beset by magical creatures, dragons, and demons. In the center of the largest island, a single great mountain thrusts upward beyond the clouds, its peak a holy place much revered by the local peoples. The peasants grow rice and net fish, but are not permitted to own weapons lest they rise up against their betters.

Mighty warriors called samurai rule the land. Their finely-made swords make it easy for them to control unruly and weaponless peasants. The mightiest, titled *daimyo*, makes pronouncements in the name of an emperor whom he holds captive in the royal palace. It is by force of arms and force of social conformity that Koryo-no-Shima's society is maintained.

Secretly, according to Jiraiya, the *daimyo* is a demon in human guise. Arrayed against him are clans of secretive assassins fighting for the freedom of the people—or secretly in the pay of the great samurai households that serve their demon *Daimyo*. Jiraiya's clan and Tsunade's are two such, united in an attempt to defeat the *daimyo*'s possessed sorcerer, Orochimaru.

## Chang'an

The land of Chang'an is vast, indeed; an entire continent under the rule of a single, powerful Empress. A chain of mountains forms the nation's spine, running from the northeast to the southwest. On either side of the range spread loess hills dotted with cities and villages, and wide grasslands watered by twisting rivers. A mighty wall forms its northern border—a wall that runs from the coast of the Farthest Sea westward for hundreds of miles, and ends at a desert fortress manned by an army of terra-cotta warriors. Each soldier among them a deserter or other captured traitor, transformed by sorcery into clay and forced by magic to serve loyally for eternity. They march the length of that great wall, generally at night, defending it from the barbarians and rebels beyond.

If only they were the only army in Chang'an! For all that nation's current unity, it was not always so; the history of Chang'an is one of warfare, as once-separate kingdoms conquered and re-conquered one another and dynasties rose and fell. North of the wall, where the vast grasslands slowly fade into desert, roving nations of proud horse nomads look upon the wealth of Chang'an with covetous eyes. The terra-cotta army is enough to hold them at bay, or so the Empress thinks. But along the coast lie former provinces of Chang'an conquered in the past by nomad lords; the Kingdoms of Wu and Jingshan are now independent nations.



Generations ago, the Emperors of Chang'an, having determined that their land was the most supreme upon the globe, turned their attentions inward. They declared long-distance voyaging superfluous, and scuttled the Chang'an fleet. The Kings of Wu and Jingshan did no such thing, and foreign trade has made them wealthy. The Empress looks upon them as rebellious provinces, ripe for re-conquest. The eunuchs of the Imperial Bureaucracy look at their prosperity with envious eyes. Thus, the Imperial Army is in the field, ready to fall upon Wu and Jingshan with flame and arrow and sword. That army is commanded by a woman—something unique in all Chang'an, where gender roles are strongly defined.

*Orochimaru was abroad upon the Silk Road gathering bandits and sell-swords for his demon master, and more generally stirring up trouble. Any foreigner crossing the border into Chang'an was therefore suspect. Surrounded by an Imperial patrol, Jiraiya and Tsunade transformed into normal-sized versions of their totem animals, and escaped notice. I, however, was taken before the general in chains.*

*General Hua Mulan was no more than my own height, and of late middle age, but her movements were vigorous. She sat on a camp stool, in her armor. I knelt in the dirt, in my shackles. Still, I made a good-enough impression; I managed not to get myself executed on the spot.*

*The great military force of Chang'an is divided into a number of independently-mobile units called banners, each comprised of thousands of soldiers armed with cunningly-designed repeating crossbows, backed by thousands more armed with broad-bladed spears and razor-keen swords. Cavalry guard the flanks when the army is on the move, and scout ahead when the army encamps. Hua Mulan commands the Gold Dragon Banner, tasked with patrolling the Imperial frontier. The Imperial Bureaucracy merely waits for an excuse, whether banditry or border-raiding, to send her across the frontier to re-take the "lost provinces."*

*The armies of Chang'an, like every other army across the Gossamer Worlds, is followed on the march by a varied group of non-military folk, mostly female, with every profession from washerwoman to courtesan represented—and whenever the army made camp, the camp followers came to visit and ply their trades.*

*The soldiers are young men for the most part, and go clean-shaven. A mustache or beard is the mark of an elderly gentleman, or at least an officer, who has earned his wisdom with experience. Someone who appears young but wears facial hair is seen as a bit presumptuous.*

*With that in mind, and in hopes of better treatment from my captors, one morning I bid farewell to my neatly pointed chin-lock. The sight of my smooth cheeks reflected in the basin gave me a desperate idea.*

*I am of compact height, and despite my strength have a slim build, so my disguise might work—at least long enough to get me out of camp—provided that, once I acquired the proper clothes, I kept my eyes down and walked with the mincing gait favored by the local girls. I made it as far as the main road before some bannerman noticed my absence. The cavalry were soon after me in force.*

*By sheer good fortune, a broad-beamed traveling cart shared the road with me. I dove inside just before a half-dozen Imperial cavalymen rode around the bend. As luck would have it, the curtains of the traveling cart concealed three women—four now, counting myself, as I hoped the Imperial troops would.*

*A scowling officer flicked back the curtain and the ladies gasped in shock. Introductions were made by the eldest, but when she came to me she paused. The youngest spoke up. "This is my handmaiden. Our lord husband is a magistrate in the capitol; we are on our way to join him there now. His two senior wives are much older than I, and he thought I should have a traveling companion closer to my own age."*

*And so, thanks to the Lady Koo, I arrived at the Imperial capitol under utterly false pretenses.*

The capitol of Chang'an is known as the Forbidden City, but that is a misnomer. Most of the capitol is not forbidden, and is in fact densely populated. Only the central district surrounding the Imperial palaces is forbidden to outsiders. No one may enter or leave that district without the permission of the Empress. The one thousand buildings that make up the Forbidden City are painted in white, gold, and purple, with red-tiled roofs and overhanging, tiered eaves. The spaces between those buildings are planted with gardens and ginkgo trees. Caged songbirds provide pleasant, soothing background melodies as the palace residents and their servants conduct their affairs.

Life in the rest of the capitol is less pleasant, and far less soothing. Raucous market squares where itinerant peddlers hawk their wares, multistory tenements strung with enough laundry-lines to be capable of setting sail, and hole-in-the-wall wine shops crowd every side. Swarming masses of porters, laborers, and thieves clog the narrow streets—all neatly laid out at right angles, but all decidedly too narrow for the amount of traffic they sustain. The City, half a world away in Great Albion, may be grander, but the capitol of Chang'an is by far more populous.

That density of population leads to many potential troubles, as people live cheek-by-jowl. To combat the social friction, Chang'an has both a tightly restrictive code of etiquette and proper behavior, and a draconian legal system to enforce it. Even minor infractions of the law, such as failure to produce work of sufficient quantity or quality, is met with brutal punishment. The chopping off of bits of the criminal is customary, up to and including important bits like genitals—or heads. The "merciful" alternative is forced labor until death on one of the great projects of the Empire: the Wall, the network of canals, or the vast network of trade roads that link the cities and provinces.



*A wanted man in the guise of a woman, hiding in the household of an imperial magistrate, has very little chance of escaping notice. The magistrate, Dee Jen-Djeh, when we finally met, was terrifyingly perceptive. His eyes glittered darkly behind the beaded veil of his cap of office. I had read the stories of his fictional exploits, and I counted on my ability to pre-emptively describe his experience in coming to Chang'an via a Door to keep me attached to my head. The judge was merciful. He believed my tale of coming from another world—in fact, he'd met others who had done so. "I believe that those of us who come here from elsewhere did so not by accident, but by design. Regardless of that design, you cannot remain in Chang'an. General Hua Mulan will eventually find you, and avenge her loss of honor at your escape."*

*Despite being busy investigating three unrelated crimes, Judge Dee graciously found the time to show me scrolls detailing all that the Empress' Bureaucracy knew of surrounding lands. How I wished for Captain Nemo's charts! Drawn after the turning inward of Chang'an, these maps became increasingly fanciful the further one's finger traveled from the ornately-inked symbol of the Forbidden City. I didn't doubt the dragons, nor the steam-breathing giant turtles, nor even the bakemono and kitsune shown infesting Koryo-no-Shima. I did, however, doubt very much that those maps would take me where I needed to go. I needed a guide.*

The aged storyteller Kai Lung, who can be found most often in the shade of a mulberry tree in one of the market squares of the Forbidden City, is a more reliable source of information than any map. His retelling of the legends and stories of the lands and peoples beyond the Furthest Sea are diverting, and indeed they beggar the imagination, but his greatest gift is that in the course of a long life he has become acquainted with a vast number of peculiar people.

## Legends of Mericia

The nation of Mercia, or Mericia (Imperial pronunciation differs) is, according to the learned Kai Lung, a continent far across the ocean, separating the shores of Chang'an from those of Great Albion. Mericia seems once to have been a colony of Great Albion. The highly independent colonials rebelled successfully, and thereafter forged their own tumultuous destiny. Eventually, they turned their eyes westward, expanding toward the Furthest Sea in search of land, independence, and gold—but mostly gold. They found it on the western shore, in a place Kai Lung called Cibola, or as Dee Jen-Djeh's map called it, Calyfern.

In between the civilized east and the wild, untamed Cibola gold fields are great plains of waving grass many days ride across, trackless deserts, and mountains topped with both snow and fire. These lands are occupied by the farmers, ranchers, and prospectors of Mericia, and by the remnant nations of the native people they displaced.

Mericia is home to a number of legendary individuals, some of whom are as fictional as Sherlock Holmes or Captain Nemo; in other words—utterly real here. The native-born adventurer Winnetou and his pale-faced sidekick Shatterhand roam the fringes of the western desert, bringing justice to those who have none. Pecos Bill, the cowboy who used a rattlesnake to rope and ride a whirlwind, frequents the border towns drinking prodigiously and, if the tale is to be believed, shooting down the moon at least once a month. Northward, in the great Salish Forest, Bon Jean the giant lumberjack, (rumored to be descended of a logger who married into a clan of the shy, large-footed creatures who roam those woods), chops down trees by the dozen with a single stroke of his axe.

Truly, the sons and daughters of Mericia are fascinating folk, and worthy of having their tales told as far away as the Forbidden City. But perhaps it is to the benefit of the rest of Planet Fiction that, like the people of Chang'an, their attention is focused inward upon their own affairs rather than outward upon the world at large. Even Planet Fiction may not be ready for the likes of them!

## Bajaristan

South and west of Chang'an lies a barren and lifeless country. The mountains of Bajaristan, at the end of the spine of Chang'an, are more desolate than any other place in Planet Fiction. Even caravan-robbers would be a welcome sight there—at least they would be proof that people still lived, in a world gone eerily quiet!

If Bajaristan is devoid of people, it is not devoid of other beings. It is a spirit-haunted land, where creatures of the imagination—and creatures beyond imagination—flourish. Dee Jen-Djeh, no longer quite the skeptic that he had been on Gossamer Earth, possesses a taxonomy of mystical creatures compiled by the Imperial Ministry of Rites. Each entry includes the notation that “this creature can be found in the mountains southwest of the Center of the World.” The scroll makes a poor travel brochure.

*If I were to flee Chang'an and return to Great Albion and the City, Kai Lung told me that first I must journey west. On his advice I joined a small group of his acquaintances also traveling in that direction: Xuanzang, a mendicant monk; his disciples, the porcine Zhu Bajie and the rather dim-witted Sha Wujing, and his bodyguard Sun Wukong, who was some manner of monkey! Sun Wukong was a remarkable creature, standing somewhat less than my own modest height, with a simian face and a long tail. I at first took him for a performing animal, trained to walk upright with the aid of an iron-bound staff. To my surprise, he turned out to be remarkably well-spoken! He was a notably better conversationalist*



than *Sha Wujing*, in fact—although if I am honest, *Xuanzang's* horse was a better conversationalist than *Sha Wujing*.

*As we wove our way through the mountains of Bajaristan, we sometimes caught glimpses through the clouds of the jungle-choked valleys below. From Sun Wukong I learned that my traveling companions were lost, though Xuanzang would never deign to admit it. They were on a mission to retrieve sutras, holy writings of Xuanzang's religion, from the ominously-named Vulture Peak. They had some idea of its location, but after passing through a strange Door, they lost their way. I've met a few folk in similar situations; once, long ago, I was one myself. They walk the Grand Stair briefly, but they are not Wardens—at least, not yet. I recognized all the signs; my peculiar companions were as fictional as Sherlock Holmes—the scroll telling of their epic journey was undoubtedly tucked away somewhere in Scheherazade's library.*

*Night falls quickly in those mountains; the sun dips below the peaks and casts the passes and crevasses abruptly into darkness. One night, as we made camp, Xuanzang's horse and my own were restive. The thought came to me unbidden that we had not seen a bird or animal of any sort for an entire day.*

*Zhu Bajie was complaining loudly of his hunger when, from the darkness beyond the roadway, towering figures rose! A dozen white skulls with broad forking antlers, their eyes alight with green flame, stood atop bodies wrapped in misty darkness. They hovered silently above us, but their psychic assault upon our spirits was crushing. My hand crept with awful slowness toward my sword-hilt, as I dropped slowly to my knees in despair.*

*Sun Wukong spun his iron staff, the ends striking with the force of cannonballs! Moving faster than even my own practiced eye could follow, he sent antlered skulls flying from the wraith-like forms of our attackers. As he fought, he barked words in a language unknown to me, but which had sorcerous import—a sudden spiraling wind tore the cloaks from our backs, and the tattered shreds of mist and fog from the spirit-forms attacking us, leaving their skeletal forms bare!*

*Zhu Bajie shattered one by dint of ramming it bodily into the rock-face. Sha Wujing and I accounted for one apiece. Xuanzang hid beneath his horse. Sun Wukong, with staff and sorcery, took care of the rest. He'll make a fine Warden one day.*

## Jhind

*"Of all the nations of this Gossamer World," Prince Dakkar once told me "it is Jhind that fills my heart with the memories of home. If ever a landlocked existence could appeal to me, it would be there among the flowering trees and the heady scent of cinnamon. Provided, of course, that the Albionese were driven back across the sea—or into Hell!"*

The capitol city of Jhind is Sidarabad—because the Albionese say that it is. A generation ago, Great Albion's superior technical expertise and powerful military allowed that nation to seize control of an entire

subcontinent. To any traveler, it is immediately evident why my former host and captor declared his private war against Great Albion—all across the vastness of Jhind, the residual evils of colonialism are apparent.

The Albionese built factories, creating jobs for city-dwellers. Low-paying, dangerous jobs, but jobs nonetheless. People flocked to the cities, and overcrowding led to festering disease and crime. In the fertile valleys Great Albion-owned plantations produce tea, bananas, cinnamon, spices, and other crops for export—but that reduces the land available to grow food for local consumption. Famine looms, held at bay only by Albionese "charity."

Great Albion, rather than annexing Jhind directly, permits a chartered corporation to administer the colony. As a result, most Albionese in Jhind are in the employ of the Chartered Oversea Trade Company. The Company employs soldiers as well as clerks and trade factors. In effect; the COTC has its own private army, and one very much in control of both the cities and the countryside.

In Jhind, everyone has a caste, a position in society to which they are born, and which they can never change. From *brahmins* to warriors to merchants to peasants to the lowest untouchables, everyone has a place. Or *bad*; now the Albionese have subverted the caste system to place themselves at the top. The Albionese retain positions of authority nearly everywhere. Only a few token Jhindari *brahmins* hold any government posts at all.

The Jhindari are a people of many faiths, some polytheistic, some not. Most faiths have dietary restrictions of one sort or another; this one forbids eating the flesh of pigs, that one the flesh of cattle, another forbids the eating of flesh altogether. It makes social dining outside one's faith as fraught with difficulty as socializing outside one's caste, further compartmentalizing society. Again, the Albionese take advantage; anyone who's tried their cuisine knows that the Albionese will eat anything. They treat Jhindari religious taboos as "quaint local superstitions" to be overcome by the application of the "civilizing influence" of the COTC.

To say that Jhind is ripe for revolution is an understatement, but any attempt to overthrow foreign rule would lead to far more Jhindari deaths than Albionese. Even if the native Jhindari regiments turned on their foreign officers, they're equipped with weapons a generation older than those of their occupiers.

*I watched the line of sweating Jhindari soldiers—known as sepoys—haul munitions up to the modern fortifications around the Chandrassa Armory, recently built by the COTC. Supplies being laid in for the upcoming inspection visit by Governor General Hastings, no doubt. I strolled idly downhill, toward the docks.*



*The line of uniforms changed color half-way there, as the sepoy's were replaced by white-jumpered sailors, belonging to the cargo ship being unloaded. HMS Ruthven was painted in bold black letters at her bow. That name seemed oddly familiar. As familiar as the sailors themselves; their varied ethnicities seemed at odds with their Albionese origins—but very much like the crew of the Nautilus!*

*Suddenly I knew Nemo's plan, about which he'd gloated in indirect fashion. The Ruthven had been reported lost at sea, but here she was, months later, delivering everything from rifle cartridges to artillery shells. The pieces fell together in my mind. Cassandra's prophecy had been full of words like "ignition," "spark," and "fire!"*

*In my haste to distance myself from the danger, I nearly crashed into a young Jhindari man making his way through the crowd. He seemed ill-at-ease in his khaki jacket and white leather shoulder-belt. It was worn over loose jodhpur trousers, and I recognized the uniform of the Forestry Service—one of the few non-COTC-controlled government entities within Jhind. "Begging your pardon sahib, are you in distress?" He said to me. "May I offer assistance?"*

*As it turned out, he could. I needed to report my suspicions to someone, and the young man, Mongli, introduced me to Captain Athelstane King, commander of a COTC rifle company. King was half-Jhindari, and therefore treated with disdain by colonists and natives alike. We found him drinking in a low establishment, alongside a raffish fellow named Daniel Dravot whose turban had seen better days—many better days.*

*I can be a compelling speaker when I must, and Captain King took me at my word. "You're right about one thing at least; if The Governor General were to be assassinated, the Company's reprisals would be harsh." His eyes took on a haunted look. "It'd touch off this whole powder-keg; the Jhindari would revolt! Even the sepoy battalions might rebel."*

*Mongli's eyes glittered at the possibility. "Company rule is no good for Jhind," he said flatly. "But if the people rise up, the Company will treat them as wolves to be put down." Then he shuddered, and reluctantly joined our conspiracy.*

*What a motley assortment we were, setting out to prevent a revolt against the crown of Albion! A wolf cub born in the shape of a man, a despised half-caste cavalry officer, a vagabond would-be king, and me. The Crown didn't deserve a one of us, but Nemo's attack would start a war that would shed the blood of millions. Detachment be hanged.*

*Thus we became the instrument of Cassandra's prophecy. The details are hardly relevant, but I must say that there is something satisfyingly anticlimactic about preventing a vast explosion. My own sense of drama was adequately sated by our would-be king's bare-fisted assault upon the person of Governor General Hastings. Breaking Dravot out of jail afterward I left to my other companions. I had at last had my fill of Planet Fiction, and wanted out.*

## No Exit

Planet Fiction obeys its own peculiar logic. That alone should have given me pause, but at first I was too enamored of its novelty. My travels through Planet Fiction were extensive and diverting, but when I turned my attention to seeking the nearest Door—I found none. I was trapped.

Doors to Planet Fiction work differently—bizarre as that notion is. Doors into Planet Fiction seem to have been common enough at one time, bringing in fictional persons from wherever they originated, but Doors out of Planet Fiction are scarce indeed. Apart from the Door that first took me to the City, they were nonexistent. Traversing half the globe I had sensed none, not even during the harrowing trip through the Maelstrom. Despairing of finding an exit on my own, I resolved to present the problem to the finest mind I had yet encountered: that of Sherlock Holmes.

*International celebrity Phileas Fogg was in Jhind reprising his record-setting world tour in the company of his new bride, Aouda. I'd not the heart to tell him that, thanks to Captain Nemo, my own journey had bested his eighty day record. I added myself to the growing entourage aboard Fogg's airship as it departed Jhind on its return trip to Great Albion.*

## Making Sense of it All

The solution, once Holmes had pointed it out, was obvious: Planet Fiction is no ordinary Gossamer World, it is a Domain in the control of a powerful individual, and thus obedient to that individual's whims. It is the Domain, in fact, of Scheherazade! His logic was impeccable: she is from my own Gossamer Earth, and her uncanny library contains all of Earth's fiction and myth, and much else besides. In all of Planet Fiction, she and she alone has access to those tales. She must be the conduit by which all the fictional persons came to this Gossamer World.

I should have realized it earlier, but it is seldom the case that one enters unbeknownst a Gossamer World that is someone else's personal Domain. Looking back, the evidence was clear; what else explains the broad variations in technical and social development between regions? The will of a Gossamer Lord or Lady easily overrules both logic and nature, shaping their Domain in in any fashion that suits them.

Additionally, Doors don't dissipate naturally; they have to be closed on purpose by a Master of the Grand Stair, or a ruler sufficiently-attuned to their personal Domain. Likewise, it is only the will of a Domain's ruler that can





place that Domain in the path of a traveler, controlling its destiny to the degree necessary to lead them to it. Planet Fiction has welcomed many imaginary persons into its fold in just that fashion, and the Doors have closed behind them.

## Sinister Plotting

But what of the “real” people who find (or as Masters of the Grand Stair *make*) a Door into Planet Fiction? We seem rather less welcome! It is clear to me that some force in Planet Fiction throws perilous—and potentially fatal—incidents into the path of any outside visitor with astonishing regularity. Often these incidents are twisted versions of the plots of Planet Fiction’s source material, or at least events eerily reminiscent of those plots. It would not surprise me to discover that every visitor to Planet Fiction is presented with kidnap attempts, opportunities to impersonate someone else, treasure maps, and seemingly impossible crimes at every turn. In Planet Fiction, history is certain to repeat itself—and unlike the protagonists of fiction, outsiders have no guarantee of survival!

*I offered Holmes and Watson my theory that some force in this Gossamer World had been acting against me, trying to remove me using the only tools it has to hand—the stories of the inhabitants! Watson, a writer by avocation, took exception to my statement. “You say the world has an editor? Poppycock! As a God-fearing man I*

*really must protest!” Holmes smiled, amused at his friend’s outburst, then grew serious as he began to consider the notion. “This may be relevant to my own inquiry. The name Irene Adler was a pseudonym, chosen perhaps to attract my attention. Its bearer attracted far worse. Evidence points to the late so-called Miss Adler being from the world-stair, as you are. Perhaps that is why she was killed.”*

## Revised to Death

Scheherazade’s unique power gives the protagonists of the stories in her collection life, and summons them to Planet Fiction. But her library contains much that is more recent. Someone—or as Holmes had once put it, *something*—had a hand in that. Some force, which thanks to Watson I began to call “the Editor,” that also keeps outside influences at bay. Whatever its reasons, the Editor wants to keep Planet Fiction pristine, unsullied by the influences of uninvited guests such as myself and the late Irene Adler.

*Returning to my rented flat, I awaited the next unlikely event destined to put me in mortal peril. My restless sleep was filled with dreams not my own, and I came awake instinctively fighting to hold my mind closed against what felt like an Icon contact. Above me in the darkness, a pulsing structure of blue energy was unfolding! It resolved into a vaguely manlike tracery limned in flaring blue sparks, and wreathed in darkness like a cloak.*

*“Spring Heeled Jack, I presume.” Arcs of lightning flashed in response, setting my bedclothes alight as I rolled clear. Naked and unarmed, I drew upon the Eidolon for defense—and found my efforts blocked!*



*"Are you some creature of Scheherazade's?" I asked. The crackling from the pulsating form resolved into a voice. "How fascinatingly wrong you are. Say rather, that she is a creature of mine!" Lightning lashed out again as the fire on the bed spread to the drapes. "You intrude upon her perfect work." It intoned. "Like the woman who entered before you, you cannot escape correction." In desperation, I charged the window of the burning garret and, one arm across my face to shield it from the flames, dove through! The fall might not kill me; the Editor and the fire surely would.*

*I lost my concentration then, and the Icon contact connected fully as I was in free-fall! Grasping blindly, I seized my unknown savior's hand and pulled myself through! I landed, not broken and bloody in the street below, but alive and naked upon the Grand Stair.*

*Owing one's life to a persistent scoundrel like Yaeger Zane is slightly preferable to being burned alive. Or so I tell myself.*

## Final Thoughts

Planet Fiction is an interesting place to visit, but it is a far more dangerous place than it seems. Anyone venturing there is entering the territory of a jealous god, one that seeks to remove outside influences as expeditiously as possible. Travel with caution; in Planet Fiction, one runs the very real risk of being "adventured to death."

## Planet Fiction Domain Table

Technology Level	Steam, Electricity (advanced by a variant physics)
Magic Level	Magic is known and believed. Supernatural creatures are not uncommon.
Security	Restricted Access [2 Points] (few Doors lead to Planet Fiction—and fewer lead away from it.)
Type	Primal World [4 Points]
Control	Control of Destiny [4 Points] (current owner: Scheherazade, in concert with her secretive mentor, the Editor.)
Influence on the Powers	Eidolon—Average
	Umbra—Average
	Sorcery—Strong
Special	Planet Fiction is a unique place, where known-to-be-fictional beings are demonstrably real, and where real individuals seem destined to be thrown into unlikely and perilous situations at frequent intervals. A powerful and primal magic is at work here.

## Upon Melancholy Reflection

*To have one's strength so easily bested is sobering; the Editor far surpasses my abilities with the Eidolon, so much so that I can only think that it represents another order of being entirely. An Annunaki, perhaps—their legends are many, and the facts about them few. That, at least, can be remedied; knowledge may not be power, but sometimes it is an acceptable substitute.*

*Having escaped Planet Fiction alive, I prefer to think that perhaps Miss Adler, whatever her true identity, might somehow have survived as well. But I'll not seek her elsewhere. Attempting to prove my theory would be to admit that it might be false, after all.*

—Remi Haden-Franz

## Dramatis Personae

I append here brief biographies of some of the notables I have encountered in Planet Fiction. It has become clear to me that the more notable the individual, the more enigmatic they tend to be. Some of the things I chronicle below are tales told by or about these people which I can only presume to be outright lies. Still, the lie someone tells about themselves is often a clue to the truth they wish to conceal, is it not?

Each character in this section is provided at three different power levels, so that GMs can mix-and-match to suit their particular game. The separate write-ups can be used independently, but it is also possible in many cases to use the higher power levels as experienced versions, in the event that a GM wishes to have a character reappear in a later adventure. For purposes of point value, they are calculated from Paragon Rank, and credited for reduced Ranks.

Characters who have ventured into Planet Fiction from other Gossamer Worlds are noted as having the *Power Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points], since they've experienced the Stair at least once. The few noted as having *Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points] are just that: Wardens. They've learned enough of the Stair and the denizens thereof to be accorded the title, and they may well know one or more of the well-traveled Wardens such as Calais, Dayle, or Lucien.

## Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes first developed his methods of deduction as a university student. At the suggestion of a classmates' father, he took up the profession of consulting detective. Financial difficulties led at one point to Holmes taking on a roommate at his lodgings in Baker



Street in London, Dr. John Watson. Thereafter the two became nearly inseparable, and Watson supplemented his medical income by preparing Holmes' notes on his various cases for publication—a process which continues to make Holmes rather uncomfortable.

The life of a consulting detective is never likely to be a quiet one, and at various points Holmes found himself at odds with the “Napoleon of Crime,” Professor James Moriarty. Moriarty, a genius mathematician with absolutely no moral compunctions, may perhaps have other capacities. Holmes and Watson followed Moriarty through a Door—little suspecting what awaited them beyond the Veil!

---

### Dr. Joseph Bell [35 Points]

---

“When we first came through the Door to this place, I was instantly cautious. Circumspection seemed the wiser course, and Watson began introducing me by a pseudonym—he chose the name of a colleague of his, whose talent for ratiocination supposedly rivals my own.”

Holmes' imposture as a medical professional cannot stand close scrutiny, but Watson at least hopes it will put Professor Moriarty off his scent as he acclimates to his new environment.

#### Attributes

Psyche—50 Points

Strength—Superior Rank

Endurance—Paragon Rank

Warfare—Superior Rank

#### Allies

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Dr. John Watson, under the identity of Dr. Ormond Sacker, MD, graduate of the Medical College of St Bartholomew's Hospital.

*Partisan Support* [3 Points]—The Irregulars; a band of street children who act as Dr. Bell's eyes and ears throughout the City.

#### Stuff

Good Stuff [2 Point]

---

### The Consulting Detective [75 Points]

---

Establishing himself in the City and still in pursuit of Professor Moriarty, Holmes continues to practice his calling. It's the best way to find out if Professor Moriarty is as insinuated into this city's criminal underworld as he is into London's.

Given his powerful intellect, Holmes is capable of deducing from his own experience many facts about the Grand Stair, and about the operation of Doors.





What he lacks, at this stage, is contact with anyone who has knowledge of those topics—at least until he can track down Professor Moriarty!

### Attributes

Psyche—75 Points  
Strength—Paragon Rank  
Endurance—Paragon Rank  
Warfare—Superior Rank

### Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]

### Affies

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Dr. John Watson, MD, late of the British Army and veteran of the war in Afghanistan.

*Partisan Support* [3 Points]—various Inspectors of the Metropolitan Police, who trust Holmes' abilities and privately consult with him on difficult cases.

### Stuff

Good Stuff [2 Points]

---

## The Mastermind [180 Points]

---

The ultra-rational Holmes is at first uncomfortable with Planet Fiction's functional magic, but as with any other subject of interest, he makes an exhaustive study of the topic. Holmes is unlikely ever to master Sorcery, but after writing several well-received monographs for *The Athame*, the premier peer-reviewed journal of Albionese wizardry, he has developed a surprising understanding of the simpler uses of magic.

### Attributes

Psyche—100 Points  
Strength—20 Points  
Endurance—20 Points  
Warfare—20 Points

### Powers

*Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points] *Cantrips* [5 Points]

### Affies

*Dr. John Watson*, as above.

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—"Alice," a fellow fictional person and former Irregular, with extensive experience of certain extremely peculiar Gossamer Worlds. She is regularly consulted by Holmes when the subject of Looking-Glass Magic arises.

### Stuff

Good Stuff [3 Points]

## Holmes as an Ally

Sherlock Holmes is the finest ally anyone could hope to have. He's loyal to a fault and immensely capable both as an investigator and—in extremis—as a combatant. The only difficulty is maintaining his interest. Holmes suffers greatly from ennui, and his sense of overwhelming boredom with all that life has to offer is broken only by puzzles requiring his unique mental gifts.

Holmes' greatest value as an ally is of course his immense intellect. His incisive rationality and the speed with which he draws conclusions allow him to anticipate difficulties well before they arise.

## Holmes as an Enemy

Contrariwise, Sherlock Holmes is an implacable enemy, capable of out-thinking all but the most ingenious and inventive foes. Holmes would say that his only natural enemy is the criminal mind. If you find yourself on the bad side of the world's greatest detective, you must always assume that he has already planned three steps ahead.

Holmes makes it his business these days to find out about people who seem to be from other worlds. A visitor to Planet Fiction, however circumspect, is likely to come to Holmes' notice sooner rather than later. Those with criminal intent or violent agendas (such as Captain Nemo) will find themselves at odds with Sherlock Holmes.

## Objectives

As residents of Planet Fiction, Holmes and Watson are in unfamiliar territory. They must learn the nature of the larger cosmos they have discovered—discovered, in no small part, thanks to the machinations of Holmes' eternal nemesis, Professor Moriarty.

Holmes came to Planet Fiction in pursuit of Moriarty, and he will continue to pursue Moriarty across a hundred Gossamer Worlds, and up and down the Grand Stair itself if he must. His antipathy for the Napoleon of Crime is so great that he would willingly sacrifice his own life, so long as Moriarty died as well.

## Captain Nemo

Captain Nemo (Latin for "nobody") has gone to great lengths to shroud his origins in secrecy. According to legend, he is the son of the Rajah of Bundelkund, a region in central India. Following the Sepoy Mutiny, a war against the British East India Company's rule, in which he lost both his family and his kingdom, the young prince devoted himself to scientific research. This wasn't a distraction from grief, nor out of any devotion to progress; no, his intention was revenge!



---

## Prince Dakkar [65 Points]

---

Prince Dakkar, surviving son of the Rajah of Bundelkund, spent his youth studying in Europe. He used that technical education, and the wealth remaining to him after the war, to construct an experimental submersible vessel—the *Nautilus*. He crewed the submarine with a band of international outcasts, men who, like himself, had suffered loss because of war and the pernicious philosophy of imperialism.

Claiming to have no interest in the affairs of the surface world, Nemo holds all that mankind has done on dry land in contempt. He uses no materials that are not marine in nature; equipping, dressing, and feeding his crew with the bounty of the sea. Professing no political affiliations beyond a fierce hatred of colonialism and oppression, Prince Dakkar uses the *Nautilus* to intervene in situations where an underdog is beset by a more powerful enemy. Refusing to set foot upon land claimed by any nation, he instead bases the *Nautilus* in a grotto beneath an uncharted island in the South Pacific.

### Attributes

Psyche—20 Points  
Strength—Paragon Rank  
Endurance—15 Points  
Warfare—20 Points

### Artifacts & Creatures

*The Nautilus, a prototype submarine* [10 Points]

- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]

### Allies

*The Crew of the Nautilus* [2 Points]

- *Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]
- Named and Numbered [x 2]

### Stuff

Bad Stuff [2 Points]

---

## The Mysterious Captain [140 Points]

---

“I am not what is called a civilized man. I have done with society for reasons that seem good to me, therefore I do not obey its laws.” —Captain Nemo

No secret can be kept forever. Repeated interventions by the *Nautilus*, resulting in the sinking of warships of various navies brings the existence of “Captain Nemo” to the attention of Admiralties worldwide. He declares, for reasons he feels to be entirely just, war upon all the warships of the surface world—but especially those of colonial powers.

Evading capture, Nemo assays the Moskstraumen, off the Norwegian coast, and finds his way to Planet Fiction via the Maelstrom in the narrows between the Great Ocean and the Winedark Sea. Finding the nation of Jhind under Great Albion’s colonial yoke, just as the land of his birth suffered under the British Raj, Nemo makes preparations to put the situation right.

### Attributes

Psyche—25 Points  
Strength—15 Points  
Endurance—25 Points  
Warfare—30 Points

### Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points] Umbra Affinity [10 Points]—The cold hatred in Nemo’s heart interacts with the substance of the Gossamer World he inhabits. Those things which he despises suffer an increase in entropy and instability when Nemo is near.

### Artifacts & Creatures

*The Nautilus, Nemo’s submarine* [28 Points]—“You understand the trust I repose in my *Nautilus*; for I am at once captain, builder, and engineer.” —Captain Nemo

- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Stupendous Stamina [8 Points]
- Impervious to Harm [8 Points]
- Destructive Damage [8 Points]—electric torpedoes

*Electric Rifles* [8 Points]—carried at need by Nemo and his crew

- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Named and Numbered [x 2]

### Allies

*The Crew of the Nautilus* [2 Points]

- *Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]
- Named and Numbered [x 2]

### Stuff

Bad Stuff [8 Points]

---

## Captain Omen, Against All Flags [220 Points]

---

As airships and aircraft become more common, and more integrated into the commercial and military dealings of Planet Fiction’s nation states, Prince Dakkar finds that his crusade against colonial imperialism via naval action is too limiting. The more the technological base of Planet Fiction advances, the greater the need for something faster and more powerful than the *Nautilus*.



The Gérolstein Air Force points the way toward the future, and Prince Dakkar's genius for invention surely follows. Air travel makes the world a smaller place, and the Prince realizes that the many sins of imperialism, even here on a different version of Earth, are but the symptoms of a deeper disorder: nationalism.

With a new (but equally-portentous) pseudonym and aerial vessels of absolute potency, Prince Dakkar's crusade could extend beyond Planet Fiction to other Gossamer Worlds—provided that he can find a suitable passage.

### Attributes

Psyche—40 Points  
Strength—30 Points  
Endurance—40 Points  
Warfare—60 Points



### Powers

*Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points]

### Artifacts & Creatures

*Albatross and the other Aerial Leviathans, Omen's fleet of airships* [32 Points]

- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Deadly Damage [4 Points]—aerial cannons, bombs
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]
- Named and Numbered [x2 Points]—*Albatross, Invincible, Falcon, Challenger, Poseidon, Fury, Ganesha, Vengeance, Rudra, Scourge, Heritage, and Shiva*

### Allies

*The Crews of the Aerial Leviathans* [3 Points]

- *Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]
- Horde [x 3]

### Stuff

Bad Stuff [5 Points]

### Nemo as an Ally

Captain Nemo has few friends beyond his crew. He has, on occasion, made alliances with specific individuals when it has suited his purposes. To those individuals he is as honest and forthright as he can be. If Nemo is your ally, however, be aware that he is first and foremost interested in his own goals. His availability to assist you with yours may be curtailed.

### Nemo as an Enemy

Nemo's anger is a simmering thing, generally concealed beneath a near-emotionless exterior. He is entirely capable of waiting years to inflict vengeance upon those who have wronged him, or wronged those whom he has sworn to protect. He firmly believes in his right to declare war upon entire nations, and is ruthless in his pursuit of retribution.

Nemo's existing enemies are, in the main, national governments, not individuals. He is not a man who thinks small. The military forces of any colonial power are subject to immediate reprisal whenever and wherever Captain Nemo encounters them. In terms of individuals, he has little respect for anyone from Great Albion or the other continental powers—they remind him too strongly of the European colonialists who destroyed his family and seized control of his nation. Of his fellow exiles in Planet Fiction, Cassandra and Mowgli have both earned his ire. It goes without saying that he plots revenge upon them.



## Objectives

In whatever guise, Nemo is a man on a crusade—and he can do nothing else but labor unceasingly toward his goal: the elimination of exploitation and injustice perpetrated by the strong against the weak. Although he regrets the deaths he causes in pursuit of his ultimate victory, he cannot and will not stay his hand until his mission is complete. Beware the zealot, for there are few actions that Nemo would not contemplate in order to bring about the end of colonialism, nationalism, and the subjugation of one people by another.

## Cassandra

Cassandra, daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, was granted the power of prophecy by the god Apollo, by way of attempted seduction. When she refused his advances, he gave her the curse that her prophecies would never be believed. She prophesied the destruction of Troy at the hands of the Greeks, and attempted to set fire to the Trojan Horse, within which the Greeks were hiding. But it was all for naught, and Troy fell just as she had predicted.

After the war, Cassandra was given as a war-prize concubine to King Agamemnon of Mycenae. While Agamemnon waged war against the Trojans, his queen Clytemnestra began an affair. Upon Agamemnon's return from the war, Clytemnestra and her lover attempted to murder both Agamemnon and Cassandra. It's remarkably difficult to murder someone with precognitive abilities; Cassandra could not save Agamemnon, but she could save herself. Fleeing the darkened palace, something even she could not have predicted occurred—she exited not through a door, but through a Door.

---

### Fate Witch [85 Points]

---

Cassandra might be a fraud. Prophecy—true, accurate prophecy is an ability beyond the pale for mortals. Maybe she only pretends to predict the future, relying upon Sorcery and a thorough understanding of human nature to make oracular statements that can be interpreted in many different ways. A reputation for being disbelieved only adds to the plausibility of her statements, when viewing them in hindsight.

#### Attributes

Psyche—75 Points  
Strength—Superior Rank  
Endurance—Paragon Rank  
Warfare—Average Rank



#### Powers

Sorcery [15 Points]  
Empathy [30 Points]

#### Stuff

Zero

---

### Hapless Prophetess [185 Points]

---

But if her legend is real, Cassandra is doomed by her curse. She can neither stop the visions, nor prevent them from coming to pass—and never, ever, are her prophecies believed. It must be maddening, and perhaps she *has* been driven mad.



### Attributes

Psyche—85 Points  
Strength—Paragon Rank  
Endurance—Paragon Rank  
Warfare—Paragon Rank

### Powers

*Sorcery* [15 Points] *Blessings & Curses* [35 Points] *Advanced Empathy* [50 Points]—Cassandra's gift—or curse—is the Prescience ability granted by Advanced Empathy. The drugged smoke which she breathes does not induce her trance, but it so alters her perceptions of the passage of time that she can predict further into the future than the one-to-six ratio normal for Prescience.

### Stuff

Zero

## Oracle of the Eidolon [334 Points]

The future is only the pattern of the present extrapolated through time. With a thorough enough understanding of the Eidolon structure underlying a Gossamer World, every element of its future could be predicted with great precision; all it takes is complete knowledge of the starting conditions. Cassandra might be one of the most advanced Mistresses of Eidolon the cosmos has ever seen, using her knowledge to calculate future events—and perhaps even influencing those events by the use of her prophecies.

### Attributes

Psyche—100 Points  
Strength—25 Points  
Endurance—20 Points  
Warfare—Paragon Rank

### Powers

*Sorcery* [15 Points] *Eidolon Mastery* [50 Points] *Blessings & Curses* [35 Points] *Advanced Empathy* [50 Points]

### Artifacts & Creatures

*Kylix of Prophecy* [16 Points]—A shallow, footed bronze drinking bowl, chased with figures of battling warriors, horses, and chariots.

- Integral to a Power (Eidolon) [4 Points]
- Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 Points]—The Kylix makes a ringing sound, like a finger being drawn around the rim of a crystal goblet, when danger to its owner is nearby. Additionally, it can link the minds of anyone who share draughts of wine from it, even if they enter separate Gossamer Worlds.
- Impervious to Harm [8 Points]

*The Sibyls* [8 Points]—The twelve blind handmaidens who apprentice as oracles under Cassandra. None have her capacity for prophecy, but they are all psychically aware.

- Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 Points]
- Named and Numbered [x 2]

*The Maenads* [15 Points]—The madwomen who worship at Cassandra's shrine, and vow to protect the Oracle. The drugged smoke they inhale sends them into fits and frenzies—often bloodthirsty frenzies.

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Combat Training [1 Point]
- Hardened Weapons [1 Point]—Their teeth and claw-like fingernails
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- Horde [x 3]

### Stuff

Zero

## Cassandra as an Ally

Cassandra is no one's ally. She's spent her life being disbelieved, and accepts her curse as normal. Her detachment from mere mortals is legendary, and rightly so; the lives of others unfold around her like those of characters in a play she has already seen too many times. She knows how the story ends; befriending the actors before the final curtain is hardly worthwhile.

## Cassandra as an Enemy

As an enemy, Cassandra is effective not because of her prophecies—which are beyond her control—but because of her ability to use Sorcery or Curses to bedevil those who displease her. As a long-time resident of Planet Fiction, she is intimately familiar with the local magical energies, and uses Sorcery with a creative and vindictive flair.

Cassandra bears no ill will to anyone who bears her none. The other denizens of Planet Fiction she treats with equal disinterest. She's earned Captain Nemo's enmity, but does not return it. From Cassandra's point of view, Nemo's fate is already sealed.

## Objectives

Cassandra, like most seers who remain even a little bit sane, is blind to her own personal future. If this Gossamer World is her Hades, then so be it. It won't change her nature or her behavior.

She cannot help but be aware of the other notables of Planet Fiction, but she makes no plans either for or against them. She does for them as she does for any petitioner: speak the truth, no matter what the cost, and let the consequences come as they will.



## Scheherazade

Scheherazade is the eldest daughter of Jafar, vizier to the mighty Sultan Shahryar. The Sultan, betrayed by his wife and distrusting of all women, vowed to marry a virgin each evening and execute his new bride the following morning. In this way, his wives would remain ever-faithful. In order to save her younger sister Dunyazade from that horrific fate, Scheherazade volunteered to marry the Sultan herself. For 1001 nights, she wove a new and spellbinding tale for her husband every night, stopping each dawn with a cliffhanger, thus compelling the Sultan to permit her to live another day.

### Captive of the Sultan [10 Points]

“[Scheherazade] had perused the books, annals and legends of preceding Kings, and the stories, examples and instances of bygone men and things; indeed it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to antique races and departed rulers. She had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred.”

—Sir Richard Burton



### Attributes

Psyche—20 Points  
Strength—Superior Rank  
Endurance—Paragon Rank  
Warfare—Average Rank

### Artifacts & Creatures

*Scheherazade's Library* [20 Points]

- Connected to a Power (Eidolon) [1 Point]
- Search Through Worlds [5 Points]
- Confers Search Through Worlds [5 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points]
- Confers Mold Gossamer Reality [5 Points]

### Stuff

Good Stuff [5 Points]

### Power Behind the Throne [100 Points]

When, after 1,001 stories, Scheherazade said that she had no more tales to tell, the sultan professed his love to her and spared her life. The lessons he learned from her had restored his faith in womankind. Scheherazade's father, Jafar, was dispatched to fabled Samarkand to rule wisely there, and Queen Scheherazade became the sultan's most valued adviser.

### Attributes

Psyche—25 Points  
Strength—Superior Rank  
Endurance—25 Points  
Warfare—5 Points

### Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]

*Eidolon Initiate* [20 Points]—Scheherazade has an unconscious connection to the Eidolon, which is bolstered by her Library. Without it, she has only the additional healing and health benefits of the Eidolon, and the ability to (subconsciously) manipulate Gossamer Reality. She cannot use the Eidolon for defense.

### Artifacts & Creatures

*Scheherazade's Library* [28 Points]

- Connected to a Power (Eidolon) [1 Point]
- Search Through Worlds [5 Points]
- Confers Search Through Worlds [5 Points]
- Mold Gossamer Reality [4 Points]
- Confers Mold Gossamer Reality [5 Points]
- Impervious to Harm [8 Points]

### Stuff

Good Stuff [2 Points]



---

## Author of All [260 Points]

---

What magic brought the sultan and his wise queen to this Gossamer World? Could it have been the magic of Scheherazade's own storytelling? Can a fantasist, if she believes in her tales as if her very life depended upon it, bring into being an entire world? The Stair chooses its own Wardens, and if it has reasons for those choices, they are opaque to those chosen. Perhaps Scheherazade tapped into the fundamental power of the Stair from without rather than from within its structure.

Or perhaps she had help.

### Attributes

Psyche—75 Points

Strength—Superior Rank

Endurance—25 Points

Warfare—25 Points

### Powers

*Lady of the Grand Stair* [50 Points]—Scheherazade can tell a story of her own devising, and create a Door to a Gossamer World where that story is true. She can also place a Door in the path of a character in a fictional tale she has told or read, altering their fate to bring them into her Domain.

*Eidolon Mastery* [50 Points]

### Artifacts & Creatures

*The Universal Library* [26 Points]—Every work of fiction from Gossamer Earth can be found in this library. It is not technically infinite in scope, but it is comprehensive, and therefore vast.

- Integral to a Power (Grand Stair) [4 Points]
- Integral to a Power (Eidolon) [4 Points]
- Invulnerable [16]
- Set of Icons [2 Points]—The texts in the library can be used as Icons to contact the various fictional characters therein. The main limitation to this is the time it takes to search out any particular volume from among its dusty millions.

### Domain

*Planet Fiction* [10 Points]—Scheherazade not only inhabits Planet Fiction, she created it.

- Primal World [4 Point]
- Restricted Access [2 Points]
- Control of Destiny [4 Points]

### Alfies

*Annunaki Ally* [4 Points]—Scheherazade is under the protection (and perhaps control) of a powerful being,

likely an Annunaki. This creature provides her with new fiction for the Universal Library, constantly expanding the scope of Scheherazade's power.

### Stuff

Good Stuff [5 Points]

## The Editor

The Editor seldom reveals itself within Planet Fiction, appearing only in defense of the Universal Library. Individuals scheduled for deletion simply vanish, fading into constellations of blue sparks as if consumed by a blue fire from within. Soon enough, even the evidence of such a person's existence fades.

- Integral to a Power (Eidolon) [4 Points]
- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Double Speed [2 Points]
- Tireless Stamina [4 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Destructive Damage [8 Points]
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Search Through Worlds [4 Points]
- Self Healing [1 Point]

## Scheherazade as an Ally

Scheherazade is always willing to aid someone in need, and readily sacrifices her own safety for that of others. Her ability to shape Gossamer reality within her Domain is exceptionally powerful, but also mostly unconscious. It manifests as good fortune to Scheherazade's allies that can seldom, if ever, be attributed directly to her.

## Scheherazade as an Enemy

Scheherazade has no enemies of whom she is aware. She is too kind to bear anyone ill will, and is loath to believe that anyone bears her any. Nonetheless, it's a simple matter for her to make life difficult for anyone in Planet Fiction, if her ire were to be aroused. It might even happen without her conscious knowledge.

One set of potential enemies facing Scheherazade are the Dwimmerlaik. Her so-far unique capacity to open Doors to worlds of her desire, where her stories are true, would be of great interest to the Dwimmerlaik; if they possessed such a Power, could they not re-create the worlds they have lost using only the historical memories contained in their Grand Chronicle? In the lands of the Caliph, Dwimmerlaik might well be taken for djinni. Perhaps they already are.



## Objectives

Scheherazade is aware, through her vast library, of all the many notables with whom she shares Planet Fiction, but she has little contact with them. She has revealed no awareness of her ability to use the contents of the Universal Library as a set of Icons, for example. Her personal objectives are simple: to preserve the peace and prosperity of Sultan Shahryar's city and lands, and to read the stories in her ever-growing library.

The Editor, using Scheherazade as a cats-paw, might have very different objectives. It fosters the development of Planet Fiction as its own private collection of fictional persons. Is it conducting an experiment into the structure of Gossamer Worlds, or perhaps into the nature of the Grand Stair and its Wardens? In any case, the Editor jealously guards the "purity" of Planet Fiction, and acts to erase any intruders.

## Umslopogaas

"...and he was a man full grown, a man fierce and tall and keen; a slayer of men, fleet of foot and of valor unequalled, seeing by night as well as by day."

—H. Rider Haggard

Umslopogaas spent his youth in southern Africa, learning the skills befitting a Zulu warrior and becoming well-versed in the lore and legends of his people. Little did he realize that he would one day become a legend himself. Umslopogaas was the illegitimate son of King Chaka, famed as the greatest king who had ever ruled, and the most evil—but this knowledge was kept from him by the king's healer and Umslopogaas' foster-father, Mopo.

Umslopogaas' trademark weapon is a battleaxe with an iron blade and a haft of resilient rhinoceros horn. The back of the blade is formed into a circular punch, capable of putting a two-inch hole in just about anything. It is from his use of this side of his weapon that he gets his epithet, "The Woodpecker."

### The Woodpecker [80 Points]

Umslopogaas fell in love with Nada the Lily, daughter-by-blood of Mopo, and the most beautiful of all Zulu women. But as a young and untried warrior, he could not take a wife.

Using the name Bulalio to conceal his identity, Umslopogaas fought countless duels and battles, becoming a leader of warrior impis and leader of the People of the Axe. He and his soldiers served many warlords, and his fame grew. He became known then as Bulalio the Slaughterer.

The evil King Chaka died at the hands of the rebellious princes Umhlangana and Dingaan—and the vengeful healer, Mopo. Dingaan took the throne and demanded Nada the Lily as his bride, sending Bulalio the Slaughterer to besiege the fortress of the Halakazi people, where she had taken refuge.

Recognized by and reunited with Nada, Umslopogaas fled from Dingaan's warriors, coming at last to a cave high upon Ghost Mountain. Nada sealed herself inside for safety, behind a rolling stone door, and Umslopogaas and his loyal friend Galazi faced their enemies side by side.

### Attributes

Psyche—Paragon Rank  
Strength—20 Points  
Endurance—15 Points  
Warfare—20 Points

### Artifacts & Creatures

*Inkosi-kaas* [3 Points]—Umslopogaas' battleaxe, called also "Groan-Maker" and the "Iron Chieftainess."

- Double Damage [2 Points]
- True Name Is Known [1 Point]
- *IsiHlangu* [1 Points]—A heavy cow-hide war shield.
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
- *Impis* [15 Points]—Highly trained and well-organized bands of warriors.
- Combat Reflexes [2 Point]
- Double Damage [2 Points]—short assegai spears
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]—lozenge-shaped cow-hide war shields.
- Horde [x 3]

### Affies

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Nada the Lily, Umslopogaas' beloved.

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Galazi the Wolf, warrior of Ghost Mountain and brother-to-wolves.

### Stuff

Good Stuff [4 Points]

### King of Urewe [155 Points]

The stone door that protected Nada was more than it seemed. It was a Door to Planet Fiction. In their time of need, the people of Urewe turned to Umslopogaas, the legendary warrior from another world, for protection.

### Attributes

Psyche—20 Points  
Strength—75 Points  
Endurance—20 Points  
Warfare—20 Points





## Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]

## Artifacts & Creatures

*Inkosi-kaas* [5 Points]—Umslopogaas' magical battleaxe, of whom it is said; "she must needs be wise, having looked into many men's brains."

- Double Damage [2 Points]
- Contains a Cantrip—Pain [1 Point]
- Contains a Cantrip—Quicken [1 Point]
- True Name Is Known [1 Point]

*IsiHlangu* [3 Points]—A heavy cow-hide war shield, enchanted to protect its bearer against both weapons and magic.

- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]

## Alfies

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Nada the Lily, Queen of Urewe.

*Partisan Support* [3 Points]—The people of Urewe.

## Stuff

Good Stuff [3 Points]

## The Slaughterer [280 Points]

If the story of Umslopogaas had not been interrupted by finding a Door, Nada the Lily would surely have died in that cave, leaving the heart of her lover filled only with vengeance. If Umslopogaas only afterwards found his way to Planet Fiction, his career among the peoples of Urewe and Opar might have been far different. He would come among them as a reaver, as Bulalio the Slaughterer, rising to power on the strength of his arm and the blood on his axe.

## Attributes

Psyche—30 Points  
Strength—85 Points  
Endurance—50 Points  
Warfare—40 Points

## Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points] Master of the Umbra [50 Points]

## Artifacts & Creatures

*Inkosi-kaas* as above.

*IsiHlangu* [5 Points]—The war shield of the Slaughterer, enchanted both to protect its bearer and to warn him of impending danger.

- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]

*People of the Axe* [15 Points]—A fierce group of mercenary warriors, trained to use impi formations and to be utterly fearless in battle.

- Combat Reflexes [2 Point]
- Double Damage [2 Points]—short assegai spears
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]—lozenge-shaped cow-hide war shields.
- Horde [x 3]

## Stuff

Bad Stuff [5 Points]



## Umslopogaas as an Ally

In a physical conflict, there are few people one could want fighting by one's side more than Umslopogaas. He is tireless, indomitable, and terrifying in battle. Agile, flexible, and acrobatic, his wide axe-sweeps and lightning-fast "pecks" with the rear of his blade are impossible to predict. But far more than his value in combat, as a friend and ally Umslopogaas is a wise counselor and a cunning strategist. He can lead troops in battle and guide nations in peacetime with equal skill.

## Umslopogaas as an Enemy

As an enemy, Umslopogaas is most likely to be direct. A warrior born and a chieftain for most of his life, he uses his axe Inkosi-kaas to solve problems. This does not mean that Umslopogaas is necessarily abrupt in his solutions; he takes great delight in using the punch on the reverse of his axe's blade to create tormenting but non-fatal wounds upon a foe, before finally dispatching them. It means that he will face his foes squarely, axe in hand, confident in his own superiority.

## Objectives

Umslopogaas dreams not of glory, but of peace for his adopted people. That dream is far off, due to the machinations of the Veiled Queen of Opar. The time must inevitably come when Umslopogaas moves into open conflict with her—perhaps allied with Captain Nemo, who shares his desire to end the dominance of one nation over another.

If instead it is Bulalio the Slaughterer who rules Urewe, his objective is indeed glory—glory and conquest! The glittering towers of Opar have but one destiny: to be trodden beneath the sandals of the People of the Axe!

## Hua Mulan

In Tang Dynasty China, the Emperor prepared for war. To bolster the Imperial Army, one male from each family was called to serve; a son if one existed, the father if he had no sons. Mulan's father was elderly and in poor health, so she decided to take his place. Disguising herself as a man, Hua Mulan enlisted.

### Hidden Flower [10 Points]

Hua Mulan served as a soldier for twelve long years on campaign. During this time she distinguished herself in sword-fighting, archery, and riding. She kept her gender

a secret for all that time, despite being in close proximity to many comrades-in-arms. Her fellow soldiers were neither unobservant, nor were they fools—they simply could not conceive of a woman serving as a soldier. It was literally unthinkable for them.

At the conclusion of the war, the conscripted army was mustered out and the victorious soldiers richly rewarded. Mulan turned down a commission as an officer, and asked only for a swift horse to carry her home. When she was dressed at last in her own clothes, back in her own village, her former comrades were shocked to find that the man they fought beside and traveled with for over a decade was a woman!

### Attributes

Psyche—Superior Rank  
Strength—Superior Rank  
Endurance—Paragon Rank  
Warfare—20 Points

### Affies

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point] Xianniang, warrior daughter of rebel king Dou Jiande, and Hua Mulan's sworn battle-sister.

### Stuff

Good Stuff [9 Points]

---

### Reluctant General [110 Points]

---

Returning home, Hua Mulan at first attempted to return to normal life as a country maiden. But her destiny took a different path—one that led through a Door to Planet Fiction, and the land of Chang'an. It was a land of wonder, magic, and mystery, like the folk tales and legends of the home she had behind. When mountain bandits threatened her adopted home, she once more took up the sword to defend her village.

The Empress of Chang'an, hearing tales of a mysterious woman warrior who defended the border with such passion and skill, summoned Mulan to court. Hearing her story, and impressed with her prowess, she appointed a reluctant Mulan to command an Imperial army.

### Attributes

Psyche—Paragon Rank  
Strength—Paragon Rank  
Endurance—25 Points  
Warfare—50 Points

### Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]



## Artifacts & Creatures

*Gold Dragon Standard* [23 Points]—the gold silk battle flag of the Gold Dragon Banner army. Upon Hua Mulan's verbal command, shouting its True Name, it transforms into an actual dragon to serve as air support for her army.

- Alternate Form [1 Point]—Golden Dragon
- Immense Vitality [4 Points]
- Double Speed [2 Point]
- Combat Mastery [4 Point]
- Deadly Damage [4 Points]—teeth, claws, and flame
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Able to Speak in Tongues and Voices [4 Points]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- True Name Is Known [1 Point]

*Gold Dragon Banner army* [5 Points]—The soldiers of the Gold Dragon Banner army.

- Combat Training [1 Point]
- Hardened Weaponry [2 Points]—Advanced bronze blades and polearms, deadly repeating crossbows.
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]—The majority of Hua Mulan's troops wear lacquered armor.
- Horde [x 3]

## Stuff

Good Stuff [2 Points]

## Warrior Without Peer [270 Points]

Hua Mulan, thanks to long experience, is one of the most capable soldiers in Planet Fiction. Whether in single combat with blade or bow, or leading troops in battle, she is a force to be reckoned with. No longer a naive young woman, she has become a disciplined soldier and a wise general.

## Attributes

Psyche—30 Points  
Strength—25 Points  
Endurance—60 Points  
Warfare—100 Points

## Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]

## Artifacts & Creatures

*Gold Dragon Standard* and *Gold Dragon Banner army*, as above

*Bodyguard Detachment* [10 Points]—A group of veteran soldiers loyal to Hua Mulan personally, rather than to the Empire.

- Combat Reflexes [2 Point]
- Double Damage [2 Points]—Magically-enhanced bronze swords, deadly repeating crossbows.
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]—Lacquered armor.
- Named and Numbered [x 2]

*Hua Mulan's sword* [8 Points]—A gift from the Empress.

- Deadly Damage [4 Points]
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]

## Stuff

Good Stuff [4 Points]

## Mulan as an Ally

Hua Mulan could be a powerful ally; not only is she a fine swordswoman and combatant, but she has a vast army at her command—and a dragon. An alliance with her is difficult to obtain, however. Hua Mulan is aloof; it's lonely at the top, and she is more alone than most of her peers because of her gender. Duty is the driving force in her life, rather than personal attachments or friendships.





## Mulan as an Enemy

Hua Mulan is not without enemies; other generals within the Imperial Army are jealous of her position, or disapproving of her gender. Some find it unseemly that a woman—even a woman from another world—stands beside them as an equal. Eunuchs of the Imperial Bureaucracy cynically treat her as a disposable tool. Hua Mulan's personal enemies, distinct from her military opponents, are likely to feel the bite of her sword when they least expect it. She has become a pragmatic warrior, and is disinclined to offer an opponent the opportunity to strike first.

## Objectives

Hua Mulan is a woman warrior in a society that expects women to fulfill other roles. She doesn't fit in, and cannot truly fit in—until she changes the world to fit herself. But Chang'an is a nation bound by ancient and immutable traditions, where social roles are treated like sacred duties.

And yet, Chang'an has an Empress, not an Emperor—a circumstance that cannot help but set a powerful precedent for gender equality. Of course, for Hua Mulan to use the Empress to further her personal goals is a thing to be done only with the greatest of care, lest heads roll.

## Judge Dee

Dee Jen-Djeh, son of the Imperial Prefect of Kui Provence in ancient China, was from his earliest youth a studious boy. He passed the prestigious Imperial Examination, and joined the Imperial Bureaucracy first as secretary to the Governor of Bian Prefecture. Unfortunately for Dee Jen-Djeh, his perceptive intellect earned him not only the respect of his superiors, but the jealousy of his rivals.

### Magistrate Di Huaiying [1 Point]

Dee Jen-Djeh was falsely accused of improprieties, and forced to leave his position in disgrace. With the assistance of the Minister of Public Works he rehabilitated his career, and in time was appointed as Judge Magistrate due to the depth of his knowledge and the agility of his thinking. Given the courtesy name Huaiying by his family upon reaching adulthood, he at first used that appellation to distance himself from the accusations of his earlier political rivals.

Di Huaiying (as he styled himself at this time) is a large and physically powerful man, very proud of his full black beard. His bristling brows and hooded, piercing eyes have a powerful effect upon the guilty—more than one criminal in the dock has broken down and given a full confession when faced with that implacable gaze.

The prevailing Confucian system of justice makes a judge an investigator, prosecutor, judge, and jury all at once. No criminal can be convicted or sentenced without

a confession—and if a voluntary confession cannot be obtained under the judge's wilting gaze, torture must be applied. Even witnesses face judicial torture if they refuse to tell what they know. It's an unpleasant business, but like the brutal punishments given the guilty, it is seen as a legal necessity. The law is above all, and must be obeyed.

## Attributes

Psyche—Paragon Rank  
Strength—Average Rank  
Endurance—Average Rank  
Warfare—Superior Rank

## Artifacts & Creatures

*Rain Dragon* [4 Points]—the judge's ancestral sword.

- Double Damage [2 Points]
- True Name Is Known [1 Point]
- Pass Through a Door [1 Point]

## Affies

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Sgt. Hoong, long-suffering bailiff of the Judge's court

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Chiao Tai, mostly reformed highwayman and ex-soldier

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Ma Joong, mostly reformed highwayman, skilled kung-fu boxer

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Tao Gan, mostly reformed con-artist and swindler, inveterate gambler

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—the First Lady, highborn and tactful, is Dee Jen-Djeh's senior wife and the head of the judge's personal household.

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—the Second Lady, always sensible and strong of character, can be relied upon to be practical in all matters.

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—the Third Lady, Lady Koo, is the erudite daughter of a scholar and the victim of a heinous crime. Originally hired by the judge to be a companion to his wives, he married her after some time at the urging of the First Lady.

## Stuff

Good Stuff [50 Points]

## Dee Jen-Djeh, Imperial Censor [30 Points]

Assigned to a new posting in a distant province, the judge gathered his entire household and all their possessions onto a palatial wagon and attendant donkey-train for the journey. Caught by a sudden storm in the mountains, they took shelter in a solitary monastery. Trapped inside with a murderously deranged monk, the judge discovered



a potent ability of his ancestral sword, Rain Dragon, and opened a Door just in time for his little caravan to escape the burning monastery.

Dee Jen-Djeh, his three wives, and his four assistants were at first troubled by the strangeness of Chang'an. An Empire ruled by an Empress, where supernatural and magical events were commonplace? It was enough to drive one insane! However, the judge's incisive mind once more gained the attention of a local Minister, and he was appointed to a bureaucratic office.

Promoted to the rank of Imperial Censor, Dee Jen-Djeh is not only the eyes and ears of the Empress, he is her hand—striking down criminals and rebels in the service of justice.

### Attributes

Psyche—25 Points

Strength—Superior Rank

Endurance—Average Rank

Warfare—Average Rank



### Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]

### Artifacts & Creatures

*Winged Cap of Office* [9 Points]

- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Confer Psychic Barrier [5 Points]

*Rain Dragon*, as above.

### Allies

*Gossamer World Allies* (as above)

*Partisan Support* [3 Points]—Imperial officials bow in obedience to the authority of an Imperial Censor. Judge Dee can command all but the most senior Imperial officers to do his bidding.

### Stuff

Good Stuff [2 Points]

## Imperial Sorcerer [250 Points]

Initially disturbed by the presence of magic and supernatural forces in Planet Fiction, once the judge gained access to the archives of the secretive Ministry of Rites, he began to study voraciously.

Imperial Sorcerers are part of the the Ministry of Rites, and conduct official ceremonies, auguries, and all the necessary rituals of appeasement to the deities of the Celestial Bureaucracy. In addition, they perform the necromantic spells that transform soldiers convicted of desertion into members of the eternal terracotta army.

A common sentence for the guilty under Chang'an law is *lingchi*, or execution by “slow slicing.” Nine hundred and ninety nine slow cuts of a blade precede the fatal cut. On those occasions when the judge feels that mercy trumps the legal requirement, he orders that the traditionally final, fatal cut be administered first. With the powers of sorcery now at his command, Dee Jen-Djeh can administer the *lingchi* directly—in either form.

### Attributes

Psyche—65 Points

Strength—Paragon Rank

Endurance—25 Points

Warfare—30 Points



## Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points] Umbra Mastery [50 Points] Cantrips [15 Points] Sorcery [15 Points]

## Artifacts & Creatures

*Cap of the Judge of the Underworld* [24 Points]

- Extraordinary Psychic Sense [4 Points]
- Confer Extraordinary Psychic Sense [5 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Confer Psychic Barrier [5 Points]
- Alternate Form [1 Points]
- Confer Alternate Form [5 Points]—can transform the wearer into the semblance of the Judge of the Underworld, complete with flaming brows and writhing lightning flashing from his eyes.

*Sorcerer's Robes* [12 Points]

- “Limited” Mobility [1 Point]—the robe’s voluminous sleeves whip and whirl to interpose between the wearer and incoming attacks.
- Resistant to Firearms [2 Points]
- Psychic Barrier [4 Points]
- Confer Psychic Barrier [5 Points]

*Calabash of Five Winds* [2 points]—one of a number of unique individual ceremonial objects borne by Imperial Sorcerers.

- Capable of Hanging Named & Numbered Spells [2 Points]
- Linked to a Power (Umbra) [2 Points]

## Affies

*Gossamer World Devotee* [3 Points]—the First Lady

*Gossamer World Devotee* [3 Points]—the Second Lady

*Gossamer World Devotee* [3 Points]—the Third Lady, Lady Koo

The wives of an Imperial Sorcerer are, almost by definition, persons of some importance within the Forbidden City. Each is influential in a different portion of the Court: Dee Jen-Djeh’s senior wife is head of the Bureau of Palace Attendants, and responsible for organizing the staff of the Empress’ personal household. His second wife is a friend and confidante of the Court Philosopher, and the Lady Koo is a member of the Office of Seals, a sub-section of the Bureau of Ceremonies dedicated to keeping track of the official seals used on documents.

## Stuff

Bad Stuff [2 Points]

## Judge Dee as an Ally

Whether ally or enemy, Judge Dee has come to appreciate that justice is more important than the letter of the law; if he feels that justice would best be served by leniency, he will do all that he can to administer the least punishment that the law allows. He has even, on rare occasions, permitted someone accused of a crime to

“escape” rather than force them to face judicial torture to definitively prove their innocence. One cannot ask more than that of a judicial ally.

## Judge Dee as an Enemy

Unless you are guilty of a crime, the judge is not your enemy. At worst, he may be someone who forces you to deal with unpleasant business you’d rather avoid. This does not mean that he is either a merciful or a passive man; Dee Jen-Djeh is not above using the cruelty of Imperial jurisprudence (or the terror it instills) to compel testimony from witnesses, nor is he above the use of subterfuge and trickery in cornering a wanted criminal. He is a master tactician who deploys his loyal assistants to the best advantage.

## Objectives

Dee Jen-Djeh’s primary objective is, as it always was, to punish the guilty. The laws of Chang’an are, if anything, more complex and draconian than those he was born under, and so the judge must spend a great deal of his time learning about the world around him. He is ideally placed to discover the nature of the Grand Stair, lacking only access to a Door to further his education.

## Mowgli

Mowgli lost both his parents in a tiger attack when he was only a baby. He was adopted as a cub by a pack of wolves, and raised in the wild. Despite his lack of fur and claws, he became as capable a hunter and tracker as any wolf in the Seoni pack—and since he possessed thumbs, which his brothers lacked, he was even more valuable.

His feral upbringing allowed him to understand and communicate with wild creatures. He befriended a black panther whose life history was the inverse of his own; Bagheera was raised in captivity in the menagerie of the Maharana of Udaipur, where he learned the ways of man. Through Bagheera, Mowgli encountered Bhalu and Kaa, a bear and a python, respectively. Under their tutelage, he completed his education in the “Law of the Jungle.”

## Feral Boy [115 Points]

Living wild, Mowgli learned of caves, jungle pools, waterfalls, and hollow or crossed trees that lead to a seldom-used and overgrown stretch of the Grand Stair, and then to other jungles beyond. He learned the True Names of many jungle animals and can address them each in their own language. At this point in his life, he has only the faintest memories of human language, and of his parents.



## Attributes

Psyche—Superior Rank  
Strength—10 Points  
Endurance—20 Points  
Warfare—15 Points

## Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]—Mowgli has been on a small segment of the Stair, but he is unaware of what it truly is, and only vaguely conscious of the fact that the different jungles he has explored are in fact in different Gossamer Worlds.

*Invocation* [20 Points]—Mowgli knows the True Names of most forest and jungle animals.

## Artifacts & Creatures

*Bagheera, the black panther* [10 Points]

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Double Speed [2 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Able to Speak and Reason [2 Points]

*Bhalu, the brown bear* [11 Points]

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Double Speed [2 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
- Double Damage [2 Points]
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]

*Kaa, the python* [11 Points]

- Animal Vitality [1 Points]
- Superior Stamina [1 Points]
- Able to Speak in Tongues and Voices [4 Points]
- Danger Sensitivity [2 Points]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- Contains Named an Numbered Cantrips—Paralyze, Stun, Clarity, Numb, Pain, Reveal [2 Points]

*The Seoni wolves* [18 Points]

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Double Speed [2 Points]
- Superior Stamina [1 Point]
- Combat Training [1 Point]
- Horde [x3 points]

*The King's Ankus* [1 Points]—An ankus, or ankusha, is an elephant goad. This one is covered in hammered gold and set with gemstones. It is worth a literal king's ransom, but Mowgli, in his innocence, is unaware of the evil that men will do to own it.

- Hardened Weapon [1 Point]

## Stuff

Good Stuff [4 Points]

## Young Forester [135 Points]

Mowgli is a child of man and not of wolves. In time, he is forced to make a choice: join the world of “civilized” mankind, or remain among the beasts of the wild. Adopted by a couple in a small village who had lost their own son to a tiger attack years before, he quickly learns the skills required of a civilized person: to wear clothes (even shoes), to read and write, and (on occasion) to speak politely to his “betters.”

Despite Mowgli's casteless status, a member of the Forestry Service named Guisborne hires him as a tracker, scarcely believing the stories told about the young man having been raised by wolves. Guisborne soon enough experiences evidence of the truth of the tale.

## Attributes

Psyche—20 Points  
Strength—20 Points  
Endurance—25 Points  
Warfare—30 Points

## Powers

*Walker of the Grand Stair* [5 Points]

*Invocation* [20 Points]—Mowgli knows the True Names of most forest and jungle animals.

## Artifacts & Creatures

*The Seoni wolves*, as above. Mowgli no longer lives with his pack, but they remain close. He uses them as watchers, messengers, and occasionally guardians as part of his Forester duties.

*Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, the mongoose* [14 Points]—Mowgli, now living among humankind, is no longer closely followed by the animal companions of his youth. Their place is filled, in part, by a fierce (and fiercely-protective) cobra-slaying mongoose borrowed on occasion from a colonial family of his acquaintance. Rikki is adept at hiding beneath a jacket collar, allowing him to accompany Mowgli in places where he shouldn't. Additionally, although Rikki cannot actually speak, he understands the local languages quite well. His obedience to commands is indifferent, however, and always subordinate to his own aggressively protective nature.

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Engine Speed [4 Points]
- Paragon Stamina [2 Points]
- Combat Mastery [4 Points]
- Hardened Teeth [1 Points]
- Able to Speak [1 Points]

## Affies

*Gossamer World Ally* [1 Point]—Sahib Guisborne, of the Forestry Service.

## Stuff

Zero



## The Only Son [250 Points]

It could have been different; Mowgli, possessed of talents and skills honed by years of living in the wild, could have remained there as the master of all he surveyed, truly the Lord of the Jungle. Over time, exposure to the magic of Planet Fiction might have given him the ability to bridge the gap between his two natures.

### Attributes

Psyche—35 Points  
Strength—30 Points  
Endurance—40 Points  
Warfare—45 Points

### Powers

*Warden of the Grand Stair* [10 Points]

*Invocation* [20 Points]—Mowgli knows the True Names of most forest and jungle animals.

*Limited Shapechange* [20 Points]—Mowgli can transform into a wolf at will, maintaining his human wits and knowledge. He can return to human form with equal swiftness. NOTE: If this ability is lost outside of Planet Fiction, it should cost at most 10 Points.

### Artifacts & Creatures

*Bagheera*, *Bhahu*, *Kaa*, and the *Seoni wolves*, as listed above.

### Alfies

*Partisan Support* [3 Points]—Virtually any wild creature, all of whom willingly come to the aid of the Lord of the Jungle.

### Stuff

Bad Stuff [3 Points]

### Mowgli as an Ally

Mowgli is still a bit uncertain about human social nuances. His demeanor is open and friendly, as befits someone with a simple and direct outlook, but he is hesitant to form personal bonds with people. He is most likely to come to the aid of someone who exhibits an empathy with the wild similar to his own, or who treats an animal companion as an equal associate, and not as a servant or pet.

### Mowgli as an Enemy

Mowgli's enmity is easily earned; anyone who despoils the wilderness, or lacks respect for wild things, will draw his immediate anger. Hatred is an emotion Mowgli reserves for tigers and tigers alone, but humans who gain



his displeasure are efficiently dispatched. Raised in the jungle, he has all the natural forbearance of a wolf—which is to say, none at all—when it comes to dealing with a threat. An enemy of Mowgli's is likely to awaken (for a final, brief time) with the razor edge of a kukri blade against his throat.

Recent events have put Mowgli at odds with Captain Nemo, but the two are not so different in outlook from one another. While Nemo sees the Albionese as a threat to his adopted people, Mowgli is as likely to see both the Albionese and the Jhindari as threats to the beasts who adopted him.

### Objectives

Throughout his life, Mowgli's overarching objective has been the preservation of his freedom. Whether living in the jungle or attempting to assimilate into the societies of humans, he resists all efforts at curtailing his liberty. Beyond that, he champions the cause of preserving nature against the encroachment of humanity, and the cause of preserving humanity against the encroachment of civilization.



# The Grand Stair stretches behind the scenes of the multiverse.

The Doors upon its unfathomably vast span leading the way to gossamer worlds of limitless variety and infinite possibility. Within those worlds reside all manner of people; but there is only one world where the residents are actually fictional!

Planet Fiction, where Sherlock Holmes matches wits with Captain Nemo. Where Scheherazade, Cassandra, and Judge Dee Jen-Djeh conspire and scheme. Where, somehow, the characters of Earth's literary past have become flesh-and-blood – and where real flesh-and-blood visitors are in mortal peril! Its fascinating and deadly mysteries notwithstanding, the story of Planet Fiction isn't about the place, it's about the people one meets there.

Gossamer Worlds: Planet Fiction is a supplement, for Lords of Gossamer and Shadow by Jason Durall, powered by Erick Wujcik's Diceless Roleplaying.



Find out more at  
[www.RitePublishing.com](http://www.RitePublishing.com)

