

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: The Black



AMC
2014



by Matt Banach





Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: The Black

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Special Thanks to Jason Durall for his help in developing this.

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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The Black

“The shattered limestone hallway receded as the crumbling stone slabs faded into rubble, then gravel, then dust, diminishing with every step until I found myself walking along a hallway made of nothing at all. Treading on invisible floors and running my hand against nonexistent walls, I ventured further into the void until I reached an enormous helical crystal staircase, which glimmered before a backdrop of swirling galaxies. Ascending in a spiral as wide as a moon and as tall as the heavens, the crystal staircase led – eventually – to a veritable constellation of obsidian Doors, each knob glinting with starlight. - Yaeger's Travelogue

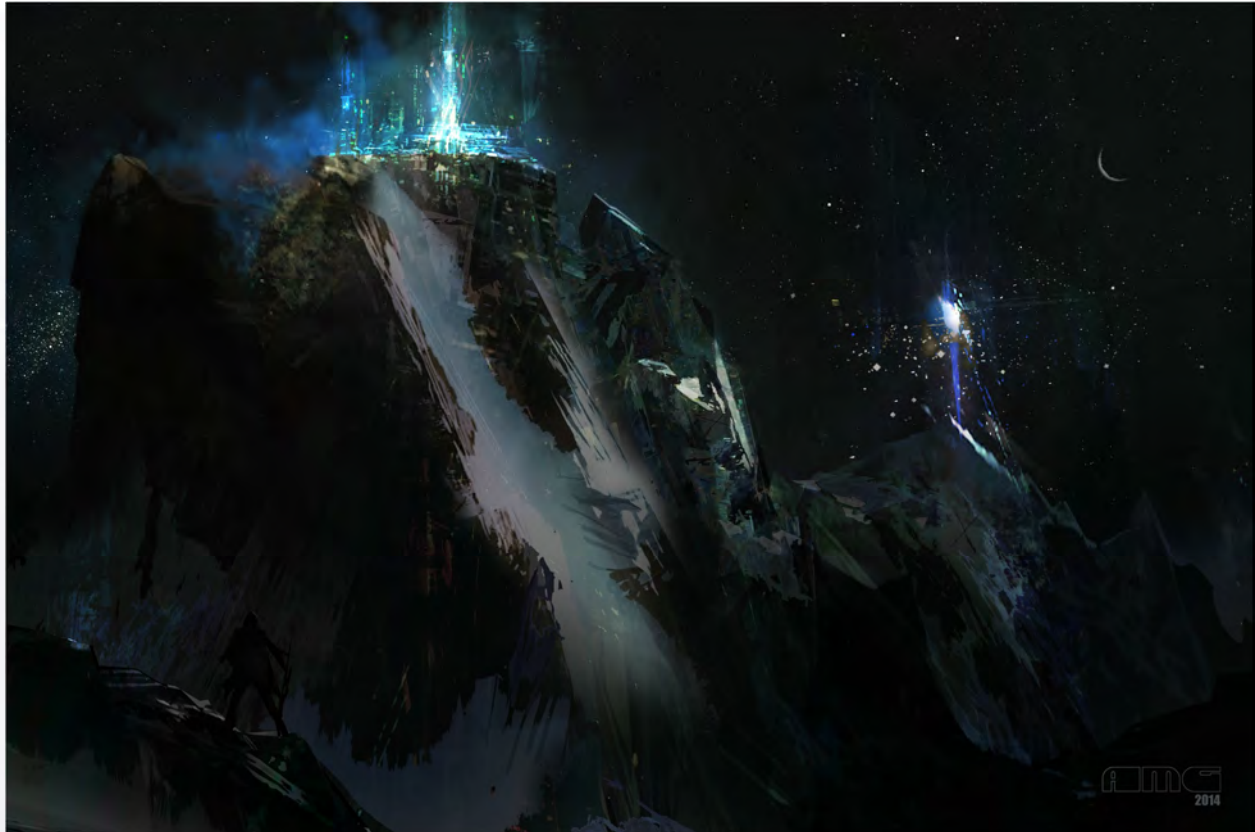
Description

The Black is a vast and ancient cosmos – a gigantic gossamer reality comprised of innumerable star systems and galaxies whirling in the far-flung reaches of cold, black space. It is a realm where alien wolds abound, intergalactic empires are a dime a dozen, and faster-than-light travel is the lifeblood of star-spanning civilization.

Among the Gossamer Lords and various other beings who walk the Grand Stair, the Black is a well-known, commonly traversed, and tactically significant gossamer reality. Multiple Gossamer Lords hold dominion over small sections of the reality, usually

claiming one planet or perhaps even an entire solar system as their Domain and shaping local gossamer reality according to their whim. However, since the space of the Black as a whole is so incredibly spacious, it barely feels like anyone has claimed any part of it at all. Spread out across the realm's vast breadth – and I really do mean 'how-many-galaxies-over-do-we-need-to-go' vast – there are many Doors by which one can exit onto different spans of the Grand Stair, which would be incomprehensibly distant from each other, if one were to simply climb it straight. Conveniently, faster-than-light starcraft are both celebrated and abundant throughout the multitudinous advanced star-faring civilizations; they've got warp drives, hyperspace engines, jump gates, “stable” wormholes, even the folding of time-space itself. Hence, so long as you have access to such transportation (and the luck and stomach to survive the ride), the Black serves as a valuable hub for travel in between distant locations on the Grand Stair.

The Black is a realm of science, driven to galaxy-spanning greatness by its inhabitants' unquenchable thirst for knowledge and mastery as they reach for – and strive to keep – their place among the stars. Super-genius astrophysicists and intrepid stardrive engineers abound, bandying learned technobabble back and forth, explaining the ebb and flow of their gossamer reality in terms of anti-particles and graviton fields, tachyon emissions and time-space singularities. It's fascinating, albeit exhausting. The rigors of the scientific paradigm are



hardly a limit on wonder – a great multitude of star-faring civilizations have advanced their intelligence and technologies to the point of regularly performing the miraculous: terraforming, teleportation, faster-than-light interstellar travel, post-fusion energy sources, spontaneous cellular regeneration, radical genetic engineering, true artificial intelligence... the list goes on. But the point is that if you can imagine it, they've probably figured out a way to do it within the rules of physics.

Science isn't the end of the equation, however. While not-so-scientific magical energy is (or at least *was*) exceedingly rare and underused in this realm of hard science, as magic is wont to do it has found a way to sneak in through the

cracks of reality. For eons the gossamer reality of the Black was stable and dependable, with the lock step of scientific cause and effect ensured by the strong influence of the Eidolon. Then, approximately thirty years ago, the Black began experiencing catastrophic surges of Umbral influence coupled with an equally disastrous waxing and waning of the Eidolon; all the turmoil you might expect from such upheaval followed, along with unprecedented fonts of magical energy produced by the newfound friction between clashing cosmic forces. The calamities have been isolated and sporadic thus far, but to this day the entire gossamer reality continues to fray and fracture: planets wobble in their orbits, once-empty vacuums erupt with spontaneous madness, and timeless

intergalactic empires teeter on the verge of collapse. Moreover, the denizens of the Black's starry civilizations have come to realize that *something* is wrong, and they're going nuts trying to do something about it.

Typical Denizens

Being a vast multi-galactic cosmos, the Black is filled with aliens and life forms of every shape, size, and sentience. Listing them all would be impossible, but I'll try and give you a sense of what's out there – *way* out there.

Humans and humanoids are plentiful and widespread in their various home worlds, colonies, and empires, though, aside from their home systems they certainly don't constitute a majority of the Black's intelligent life forms. If and when you visit, keep in mind that most of the races I'd label as 'human' call themselves something entirely different. They in fact sneer at the mention of the 'h-word', but let's face it – extra wrinkles on your forehead, oddly colored skin, and/or an abundance of facial tattoos don't really make that much difference to a Gossamer Lord, but don't tell them that. Human-alien hybrids are quite common in many systems, thanks to the species' ever-reliable predilection for eagerly cross-breeding with anything with a pulse and a tight space suit – a trait for which I remain eternally grateful, since I don't know how I'd while away long deep-space voyages otherwise. By the way, should you ever meet a

brunette by the name of Captain Thessaly Rackham, please tell her Captain Hunter deeply regrets that faux pas with the *C.C.P. Jormungandr*, the black hole, and those Parvalian pleasure-droids... and after that you'd better run before she tosses you out an airlock.

While hardly a complete listing, I'll mention a few human/humanoid civilizations by name:

The Confederacy of Colonial Planets is a fractious alliance of human systems with an aggressive fleet of exploratory vessels and terraforming engines, notorious for expansionist policies and a callous lack of regard for indigenous alien ecosystems. Confederate colonies are everywhere – freshly terraformed frontiers where a traveler could disappear amongst the hordes of drifting pilgrims and hardscrabble settlers, or, with a meager expenditure of wealth and power, shape a raw planet in their image.

The Holy Ur-Ra Empire is a galaxy-spanning imperial civilization rightly feared for their vast armada of warships, legions of genetically engineered cybernetic-enhanced super-soldiers, and a zealous devotion to their (supposedly) immortal space-pharaoh. Most Ur-Ra citizens live existences focused on the labyrinthine intrigues of imperial status, constantly scheming to gain or keep power by amassing wealth, earning glory for the empire, and/or backstabbing one's peers. Despite exercising dominion over an entire galactic quadrant for millennia, the Ur-

Ra god-emperor and Pharaoh-of-the-Many-Suns Osiri-Nef has a pathological fear of losing control, and thus has a dangerous inclination to enslave or eradicate with nuclear fire any aberrations (read: powerful interlopers) which threaten to upset the gleaming perfection of his glorious eternal empire.

The Orphans of Gaia are a widely scattered but pervasive “earthling” human cult who claim that the one true Earth vanished in an apocalyptic alien attack ages ago and is destined to be re-discovered, whereupon humanity will ascend to dominate the universe (though prophesy is terribly vague as to what *that* entails). While other races dismiss the Orphans as starry-eyed fanatics chasing a myth, I wouldn't be so sure... Earths are tenacious, and the Orphans' radical new messiah has discovered a dangerously potent wellspring of freshly-erupted magical power on a remote desert planet, all the better to fuel their holy quest – and eradicate humanity's competition.

Not-so-humanoid sentient alien races also abound throughout the Black – squid-like aquatic races, hive-minded insectoids, silicon-based intelligent oozes, photosynthetic plant-creatures, incorporeal energy-beings – too many to possibly list them all, but I'll mention a few which left an impression.

The K'Chuulazzdi are a race of amphibious crustaceans which inhabit the watery planet Laguna inside the volatile nebula known as the Genesis Cloud (more on that later). Physically, the K'Chuulazzdi are scuttling, lobster-

like creatures with spiny shell-covered bodies, usually the size of a large dog. Based heavily on aquatic biological systems, K'Chuulazzdi technology yields little in the way of hardware or starships, but they excel in disciplines such as xenobiology, biochemistry, genetics, and medicine; massive mega-coral reefs serve as their architecture and genetically engineered anemone-brains operate as supercomputers. Curious, clever, and eager to socialize with other races, many K'Chuulazzdi have left their watery homeworld to serve on alien starships as physicians, xenobiologists, and chefs. An exemplary K'Chuulazzdi and personal friend of mine, T'Kriigi, was the galley master *and* ship's doctor of the *C.C.P. Jormungandr* for years before that vessel's fateful scuttling. Should you ever find yourself on Laguna, you can rely on T'Kriigi to be a generous host and knowledgeable gossip, and if you tell him Captain Hunter sent you, he'll likely make you a pot of his disturbingly delicious proto-lobster bisque while he plies you for information as to my whereabouts.

The Centaurox are the dominant force in Omega Centauri, a globular cluster of millions of stars and attendant planetary systems packed into an area about 150 light years across – a region rife with Centaurox battle stations, churning furnace-planets, and exotic but bloody hunting worlds. Proud and bellicose, the Centaurox civilization is fond of conquest; while they are an intelligent species perfectly capable of art, empathy, and rational diplomacy,



A Centaurox

over the ages they've simply chosen the path of 'might makes right' more often than not. Physically, Centaurox are formidable – hulking eight-limbed beasts of rippling muscle and dense bone, constructed as if one made a centaur out of equal parts bull, gorilla, and human bodybuilder. An adult Centaurox can weigh several tons, and their bulging biceps are easily strong enough to rip the head off any humanoid – a fact they're quite fond of advertising. Militarily, Centaurox battle-fleets are some of the most aggressive and dangerous in their respective quadrant, though the less-than-cutting-edge hyperdrive engines on their warships render them a bit slow, which is probably a good thing for the rest of known space. Once you get past the constant threats and patronizing arm-wrestling challenges, the Centaurox really do have a beautiful culture, which values family, honor, and strength. A full-

blown Centaurox drum-opera (traditionally involving three hundred frenzied percussionist-warriors, explosives, and a generous number of alien blood sacrifices) is a terrifying yet seismically moving experience, so if they ever take you captive there's a bright side to sticking around for the show.

Non-biological sentience is prevalent in the Black – artificial intelligences, droids, 'bots, mechanoids, synthetic autonomous organisms, duplicates, constructed men – whichever variety of walking, talking computer going by whatever you want to call them. While, as you might expect, a great number of these robot-esque beings toil along as property of their creators, the Black has numerous planetary systems inhabited entirely by non-biological beings who have gained their freedom and now exist as entirely self-sufficient, self-determining beings. Geox-10, for

instance, is a dead moon with a massive computer mainframe in place of its core, its surface populated by millions of human-like (and stranger) synthoids who each wirelessly embody fragments of the moon's unified artificial intelligence. Possessed of much longer life spans and less emotional baggage than their meat-sack contemporaries, synthetic life forms have the potential to develop and ascend far beyond the bounds of normal beings. One day, mark my words, a true Gossamer Lord will rise from the ranks of these mechanical men, and the Black will become the Domain of a brand new breed of power that will shake the cosmos.

Threats

Space itself is an incredibly dangerous environment, and don't ever forget it. Vast radiation-filled vacuums are terribly inhospitable places, and even for those super-tough Gossamer Lords who might not die outright from exposure, drifting cold and alone for a few light years until you fall into the nearest gravity well, if any, will probably delay your travels on the Grand Stair no matter who you are. Likewise, even though we adore and romanticize interstellar travel, remember how perilous it can be; one bad navigation calculation can teleport you into the center of a planet, or plot your hyperdrive course through a black hole. So, when the nice starship captain tells to shut up, buckle your seat belt, and be patient, you'd better listen unless you want to get out and walk.

Mycoxene Infestation

Battling infection by mycoxene is a challenge of Endurance. A small or minimal amount of mycoxene, such as a single infected human crew member or a mycoxene-tainted object, is sufficient to overcome a person with Average-ranked Endurance; a larger and more developed mycoxene colony, such as three crew members or an infested, tendrils-covered room, can potentially overcome a Superior-ranked Endurance. Overcoming a Paragon-ranked Endurance might require dozens of lesser mycoxene hosts mobbing a powerful target, immersing the target in the heart of an overgrown colony, or combining exposure with some debilitating effect or injury to weaken the body's defenses. Once infected, a host can be 'saved' within a few days through medical intervention, potent antibiotics, or other means, but if the mycoxene has devoured and replaced any vital organs, curing the infection may still result in death, though a fungal copy of the host's brain may exist physically – or at least genetically – within the colony.

Mycoxene is not a person, nor a race, nor a technology – it is a sentient alien infection that is part virus, part fungus, and in advanced manifestations takes over the brains and bodies of its hapless zombie-like hosts. Beginning as virus-like spores then growing into fibrous molds and then massive clusters of ropy gray tendrils, mycoxene colonies not only feed on available life forms but also model



Mycoxene Infestation

their genomes upon the patterns of their hosts, creating compatible biologies capable of replacing organs and taking over minds. Mycoxene is sentient once developed to sufficient size (a patch the mass of one human body will do), and moreover mycoxene retains information and communicates with itself genetically, with messages passing along its insidious fibrous networks as surely as any wired internet. A fully infected humanoid obeys the will of the colony, sometimes even after death if the fungus has had enough time to devour and replace the host's vital organs and grow more resilient and compliant fungal copies inside the captured body (referred to rather unscientifically as “swapping gray meat for red meat”). Mycoxene infections can begin innocuously – some wispy strands hanging from a bulkhead, or a crew member's pounding headache and sudden mood shift – but once an

infection takes root, you'd better cleanse everything with fire lest the entire ship or planet become a mycoxene breeding engine. Sentients infected with mycoxene tendrils have their brains rewritten until they do the bidding of the colony, neutralizing and infecting their cohorts until the entire environment is the dominion of the fungus and it can then set its sights on the next ship, planet, or civilization. Mycoxene colonies grow in collective strength according to their size and the caliber of the host being genetics they infest and co-opt, so while a single ship's cat is unlikely to be a threat initially, even a Gossamer Lord should shudder at the thought of being held down by a dozen tendril-decked Centaurox bellowing “join us”.

Pharaoh-of-the-Many-Suns Orifi-Nef, haughty god-emperor of the Holy Ur-Ra Empire, has extended his life for

millennia through the selfish hoarding of the greatest discoveries the Black has to offer. He has spent that time gathering an arsenal of potent alien artifacts to ensure none are used against him – and that he might use them against any rival, should any appear who might actually pose a threat. While Osiri-Nef (despite his bluster) is not a personal challenge to a Gossamer Lord in terms of psychic power or physical might, his weapons and doomsday devices are certainly enough to kill even a walker of the Grand Stair. Ur-Ra battle cruisers – those immense black pyramid-shaped warships which serve as the space-pharaoh's personal conveyance and elite guard – are usually equipped with energy canons capable of eradicating planets, missiles that can trigger a spontaneous black hole, and “disportation” field projectors that can really ruin your day by teleporting every particle of your ship to a different, random sector of space. Osiri-Nef is hardly the only space-warlord with such weapons of mass destruction at his beck and call, he just comes to mind as the most recent galactic despot to threaten a planet I liked with outright disintegration. So I'll just say that when adventuring in the Black it's best not to underestimate the potential firepower at the other end of an angry hailing frequency.

Notable locations

Helion's Cage is a space station the size of a solar system, sprawling over an ancient but operational Dyson shell – an

Planet-Killers, Super-Lasers, and other Weapons of Mass Destruction

Even though they're built by mortal hands according to the laws of science, weapons of mass destruction may still possess qualities typically reserved for artifacts. Any weapon capable of destroying a starship likely possesses the Double Damage [2 Points] quality (at the very least), and any weapon capable of eradicating a planet (or worse) should be considered to have the Deadly Damage [4 Points] quality. Conversely, powerful force fields, energy shields, or other protective technologies may grant comparable defensive qualities up to and including Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]. Greater qualities may also be appropriate, at the cautious discretion of the gamemaster, though you'd better be careful where you point that thing.

immense spherical megastructure surrounding Helion, the system's intense orange-yellow sun, in a complex latticework of solar panels, habitation rings, and miscellaneous advanced space-machinery. Viewed from the edge of space, the sphere looks like flame inside a burning censer – strange, magnificent, yet almost lonely, as it is the only body in the system (every other planet, moon, or asteroid that might've once shared its sky having been dismantled long ago and used as construction-matter). Harvesting over

90% of Helion's bountiful solar radiation, the Cage's inhabitants utilize that awesome power on an equally-awesome surface area over 500 million times that of the average Earth-planet. Trillions of souls reside in the Cage's various ringed supercities in a usually-peaceful hyper-cosmopolitan society based on star-faring industry, intergalactic trade, and cross-species mingling. In a galaxy full of exceptional spaceports, Helion's Cage still ranks as one of the best; tens of thousands of shipyards and docking arrays dot the shell's exterior, and thousands of jump-gates near the system make it a nexus for intergalactic travel. One of the Black's most commonly-known Doors opens into an observation deck located on the edge of one of the Cage's equatorial habitation rings. It provides an unobstructed view of both the vast interior of this sun-in-a-bottle, and, looking the other direction, a glimpse out into the void of space and the endless swarms of starcraft flitting to and fro like fireflies in the night.

The Genesis Cloud is an immense purplish nebula approximately 100 light years in diameter, which of late, has become an epicenter for the massive cosmic upheaval rippling across the Black. While local scientists have all manner of techno-babble explanations for what is going on ("cascading temporal anomalies", "entropic anti-particle showers", "hyper-accelerated proto-planetary accretion"), in terms more familiar to Gossamer Lords: the Eidolon and Umbra are spiking and clashing, and said friction is seriously screwing with

gossamer matter, the time flow, and producing surges of magical energy in a realm where "magic" has never been the accepted power paradigm. The nebula is unpredictable and dangerous. Cosmic storms rip through the region at random, disintegrating vessels and outposts then vanishing without a trace. New solar systems have been popping up spontaneously, with nascent stars and planets forming in mere days instead of over billions of years. On these bleeding-raw "cradle-planets", life forms evolve at hyper-accelerated rates, and xenobiologists from across the galaxy flock to these mysterious crucibles to study the phenomenon – and perform their own radical experiments. The Cloud has also become holy ground for several ancient religions once thought extinct in the Black; hidden within the nebula, mystic orders are reviving long-forgotten rites to harness this sudden wellspring of sorcerous power. As if the place wasn't weird enough, a large portion of the nebula itself has become "Uo" – a newly sentient, massively-dispersed gaseous energy being dozens of light years across. There's at least one Door inside the nebula, linked to the medical bay of a xenobiological research facility on the cradle-planet Laguna, home to the lobster-like K'Chuulazzdi, a tempestuous seascape overgrown with luminescent mega-coral and infested with curious faerie-like insectoids, which will, believe me, totally gum your engines if you don't shoo all the power-siphoning little bastards out before ignition.



Laguna

Final Thoughts

The Black is an amazing place where even someone comfortable with the limitless stairways of the infinite multiverse can look out upon the distant stars and feel small. Unmatched in terms

of scale and the promise of adventure, I recommend you pay this place a visit and bring enough with you to hire a fast ship. There's a lot to see, and it is glorious.

~ Yaeger Zane

The Black Domain Table

Technology Level:	Post-Fusion
Magic Level:	Rare*
Security:	Communication Barrier [1 Point]
Type:	Primal World [4 Points] (vast, with multiple simultaneous owners)
Control:	Control of Contents [1 Point] (limited to owner's planet/system)
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Powerful/Weak* Umbra – Weak/Powerful* Wrighting – Blocked
Special*:	The Black is presently in a state of tremendous cosmic upheaval, with the influence of the Eidolon and Umbra fluctuating wildly from time to time and from place to place. These fluctuations impact the strength and availability of magical energy; while mystical power is very spare in most of the Black, in selective areas it is quite potent.