

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Lucien's Guide: The Black Files



by Rob Donoghue





Rite Publishing Presents:

Lucien's Guide: The Black Files

Explorer (Author): Rob Donoghue

Seeker (Editor): Steven D. Russell

Searcher (Cover Artist): Vincent Ptitvinc

Trailblazer (Interior Artists): Michael Richards,
Vincent Ptitvinc, Fadly Romdhani, Henry Toogood,
Adrian Mark Gillespie

Pioneer (Trade Dress): James "Devin Knight" Hazelett

Lost Boy (Layout and Publisher): Steven D. Russell

Author's Dedication to the AmberMUSH family, the biggest, best play community I've ever been a part of.

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to Rob Donoghue's son, for napping at just the right times.

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

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Lucien's Guide: The Black Files

Preface

If you are reading this, one of the following is true:

- 1. You are me. Hello you handsome devil.*
- 2. I have shared this information with you. If so, don't screw this up.*
- 3. You have stolen this file. If so, the act of you reading this sentence has notified me of your identity and location. You are welcome to try running, but I wouldn't recommend it.*
- 4. You have killed me and are going through my research. Good for you, but in doing so, you have cancelled the numerous wards in place on these files which have kept a staggering array of curses, poisons, nanotechnology and other creative unpleasanties from running amok. No doubt, you will be able to deal with some of them. Enjoy discovering which one you don't.*
- 5. I have died by some other means and you are perusing my research. I applaud the sentiment, but I sincerely hope I gave you the keys before I died, because I wasn't bluffing about number 4.*

This file will self-destruct if you lose it, or if I damn well feel like it.

-Frontispiece of each Black File that Lucien has shared.

Introduction

Stairs save me from idiots talking about Typhonians. I swear, nine times out of ten, a scholar describing something as Typhonian is just another way of saying "I don't know what the hell I'm talking about, but isn't my beard magnificent?"

A creature the size of a city crawls across the landscape, devouring forests, and crapping dreams! It must be a Typhonian!

This sword severed a peninsula from the mainland with a single swipe! Typhonian artifact!

I found something colorful in my chamberpot this morning! A relic of the Typhonians!

It is utterly maddening to go through the records of well-intentioned novice wardens (to say nothing of self-appointed sages) and find that anything large or inexplicable is automatically labeled Typhonian, as if nothing wondrous could exist in this infinity of infinities without their touch. The word has become very nearly meaningless in the breadth of its applicability.

My instinct is to attribute this to intellectual laziness, and that's certainly part of it. But I sometimes wonder if there's something else afoot, perhaps a matter of faith.

We don't talk about this much, but the discovery of the stairs is very challenging to many religious worldviews.

To GMs

Lucien's black files are a matter of curiosity among those who know they exist. It is rumored they contain some of the deepest secrets of the Universe, but exactly what secrets is a mystery.

Like all good secrets, someone may have tempered them with lies. Lucien's black files do exist, and Lucien sometimes shares them with its contributors, but that does not mean they are all true. Some are merely inaccurate, while others are intentionally deceptive, designed to send the reader off on a wild goose chase. Those collected below offer no guarantee of veracity, but the ultimate decision regarding their truth or falsehood lies in your hands.

Asses like myself may make passing comments to this being self-fulfilling, a result of irreligion being consistent with the kind of discipline and mind likely to discover the stairs, but that's self-serving nonsense. Faith and the stair are far from incompatible, at least at the outset. Arguably, you may even find more devout people finding the Stair, as their minds are already open to greater things.

That tends to change once they're on the stairs. It is rare for the specifics of dogma to survive a multitude of worlds. Rarer still for it to survive an encounter with the gods of a world - it is hard to worship a peer. Some persevere, especially those whose devotion is more to essentials than trappings. Others have crafted new faiths. But for many, the discovery of the stairs leads to a loss of faith.

It's with that in mind that I wonder how much of a proxy the Typhonians have become for some. If they are infinite and unknowable, then perhaps they fill a gap in the hearts and minds of those who may not even realize they have such a gap. For such people, would it be a new heartbreak to come to understand that the Typhonians are as much part of the multiverse as anything else?

Well, if so, too bad for them.

What concerns me is that the rampant use of the term "Typhonian" has greatly muddied any attempt to reach a real understanding of who or what the actual Typhonians were. It is sufficiently effective obfuscation that a cynical mind might suspect that it's an intentional effort. It would not take much - a few prominent warden scholars, a few centuries - just seed the stair with the term Typhonian to describe any number of things and events. In the absence of a countervailing force, the misinformation would spread like ink in water.

Of course, the simpler explanation is that people are given to grab upon the most convenient explanation for things they do not know, and the Typhonians are a

convenient explanation indeed. I will not rule out conspiracy, but neither will I dwell on it over much.

In any case, it is a confusion likely to endure for some time. Even for someone with my not-inconsiderable resources, it is difficult to find where to start. Not only are there a myriad of threads labeled “Typhonian” which one might pull on, they are almost all tied to some of the most dangerous places and things along the Grand Stair. It is a negatively self-selecting process.

And so I tread carefully. It is my intent to peel this onion, but I will not err on the side of haste. It is my hope that through the patient acquisition of information, it will be possible to assemble a fuller picture of what the Typhonians were and, by extension, to get a better grasp on the shape of this universe.

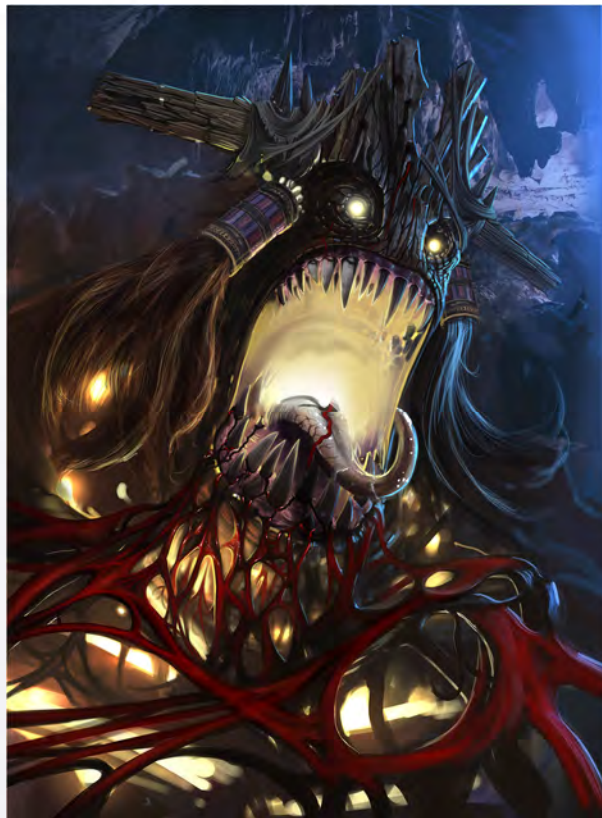
The trick, of course, will be gathering the information and keeping it safe. The fall of Arbanes illustrated exactly how fragile our strongholds of knowledge may be in the face of a dedicated foe, and so that burden falls to me. Gathering secrets is no great trick. It merely takes time, patience, and a combination of a handful of wise folk such as yourself along with an excess of enthusiastic fools.

As for safety, I have places which - I sincerely hope - are known to none but me, black holes where I may hide away the most dangerous of what we discover to reduce the risk of it being misused (or at least misused any more than we intend to). You will forgive me if I do not share the details of these places with you - while your help is welcome and valued, a secret you do not know cannot be taken from you.

File #1: Typhonians and the Typhonian Event

A review of what we know about the Typhonians lays bare much of the problem. Their unifying characteristics are almost laughably dramatic - they are old and they are powerful.

That is perhaps a bit blithe, though for reasons that maybe forgivable. When conversation turns to the Typhonians, the focus is invariable on their power. They could shape worlds. Stride the cosmos. Belch thunder and fart lighting. Dramatic stuff, but the reality is that much of that is, if not commonplace, hardly unknown. Consider the Demon-God Tyran - there is no reported upper or lower limit to the sizes his shapeshifting allows, I myself have seen him go from a period hidden upon the page to a wingspan that blots the sun in the blink of an eye, and that is only a portion of his power. It is easy to see why some would consider him a Typhonian, a fact he has been happy to take advantage of when it suits him.



Tyran

For our purposes, I will refer to him as an Echidna - a being of vast power, but not a Typhonian. If we proceed from the understanding that Tyran is an Echidnan, then we remove many elements from what is essentially a Typhonian, and in doing so, we reveal the two truly essential elements.

The first is age. Overshadowed by the idea of their power is the fact that the Typhonian’s origins and tales are shrouded in mystery due to the simple fact of there being very few around who can tell you about them. Tyran, of course, fails this, as his birth is quite well documented, in large part because he directed that an entire continent of his home world be carved into a mural depicting the event if one were to view it from space.

This issue of age is an interesting one, especially when traveling in our circles. The simple reality is that immortals are far from uncommon in our experience, and given that, it would be reasonable to expect a fairly continuous history to be available for as far back as one might want to go. Certainly, it might be difficult to dig up, but it should be available. For many Typhonians, it seems that it simply is not there. That’s puzzling. There are a few possible explanations for this:

- It is possible that there was a discontinuity, some event or threshold which broke the continuous line of knowledge. There is not small amount of

evidence of there having been some manner of “Typhonian Event”, described as a great war or similar conflict. Even the Great Enemy references it in their lore (as unreliable as that is). It is possible that this Typhonian Event disrupted things so much that it also obscured that which went before.

- A more severe possibility is that the very multiverse as we know it did not exist before the Typhonian Event. This idea comes up a lot in discussion of the origin of the Grand Stair - there is a great tidiness to the idea of the stair’s creation corresponding with the end of the age of the Typhonians.
- Conspiracy is, as ever, an option, but I reject it as the entirety of the explanation. The scope would simply be too great. That said, conspiracy paired with a discontinuity cannot be ruled out. If there were a Typhonian Event, and only a handful of immortals survived it, then the secrets would be easier to keep. It’s a disconcerting thought, if only because the conspirators would likely still number among the Lords. Certainly, it would not be out of character for several of them (myself included).
- Time is the wildcard in all this. As poorly as we understand how a Lord can alter time in his domain, our understanding of a Typhonian’s ability to do so is absolutely sickly by comparison, especially when we talk at this scale. It is entirely possible that the question itself is nonsensical in ways we simply don’t understand.

Even now I fall into the trap with this idea of a Typhonian Event. Not because no such thing happened - it almost certainly has - but with the idea that it has only happened once. The reality is that there likely have been several events of that kind of scope. Yes, the Grand Stair has purged itself at least twice, which suggests that it could actually have done it any number of times. It’s **possible** that these might qualify as Typhonian events, but the fact that we have record of them suggests that they are of another order entirely.

For now, let’s proceed on the assumption that there was at least one Typhonian event, and that it introduced a discontinuity. The exact details do not necessarily matter - if reality was very different beforehand, then our understanding is likely to be profoundly flawed, and if it was not, then what do we lose? It seems most likely it was a conflict of some sort, at least if one plays the odds, but that doesn’t narrow things down much.

So before this event, there were beings of power. After the event, there are still beings of power. That helps us very little, except that some of these beings are older than others. This does raise an interesting question: while we define the Typhonians by power, are there any weak Typhonians? Beings whose power might be closer to those of the Lords, and who are simply long lived enough to remember a time before? I shall have to think upon this.

Thankfully, this is where the second point may help us: the Typhonians supersede the Grand Stair in some way. That may seem a strange turn of a phrase, but consider what the Grand Stair is, it is our primary point of

The Grand Scaffold

There’s a theory that explains all this. I don’t like it, but I share it in case you find some use to it.

If you accept the possibility that the Typhonian event (or a Typhonian event) resulted in the creation of the Grand Stair, then the logic is as follows: Prior to the creation of the Grand Stair, we still had worlds floating around in shadow, like bubbles in a thick liquid. They floated about, possibly directed, and when they touched, it was possible to pass between them. Clusters of these bubbles could form their own little mini-multiverses. This was great for the powerful beings, who passed between worlds and did as they pleased, but it was pretty bad for everyone else.

So, in time, a collection of Gods, Archmages and Powers that Be gathered together. Their identities, and even their number are a mystery, and they tend to correspond to whatever virtues the speaker wants to promote. However, their purpose was to fix the universe, and so began their great work: The Grand Stair.

Not everyone was on board with this idea, so the powers fought. Huge battles, worlds shattered, stuff like that. Collectively, the two sides of this battle were the Typhonians, and by the time things wrapped up, there were a lot fewer of them.

However the war went, the upshot was that the Grand Stair got built, and this is where this gets interesting. Connecting worlds was secondary to its main purpose - serving as a sort of cosmic scaffolding. It pushed the worlds apart, and spread them throughout shadow, given them a structure that kept them from pooling and piling up like they had before. Now, if you wanted to pass between worlds, you either had to brave Shadow or the Grand Stair.

I am skeptical of this story. It is a little bit too much the grand drama for my sensibilities. More, even if there is some truth to it, then it blithely ignores the role of Eidolon & Umbra, which I cannot imagine as playing no part in something so foundational to the universe. In fact, I have heard variants of this story where the heroic Eidolon or Umbra sacrifice much of their power to make the universe less chaotic/more free, so I take it with a lot of salt.

*Remember, an explanation of why non-stair travel is so difficult is only compelling if you have a real reason why it **should** be easier.*

reference for much of the multiverse. They are of an order with the stair - perhaps even its makers - and their relationship with the Gossamer worlds does not *depend* on the Grand Stair. In concrete terms, this means that they have means to travel between worlds without the Grand Stair and without Doors.

While that is impressive as an expression of pure power, it is easy to miss the true significance of this.

As Wardens, we view the Grand Stair as a means of transit. A wonder that connects infinite worlds, but imagine for a moment that you are Echnidna - a vast and powerful creature, capable of leveling cities; your power is unstoppable, yet there is one thing that you will almost certainly be unable to do: fit through a Door.

We do not often think about the ways the Grand Stair and its Doors acts as a barrier to travel between worlds, but we benefit from them every day. The simple fact that each doorway acts as a bottleneck serves as a limiter on military ambitions. The Great Enemy is far from the largest or most powerful army one can find in the Gossamer Worlds, but it is unique in its ability to deploy so strongly across the Grand Stair. Without the Grand Stair and Doors as a limiter, I would expect perpetual war between empires that would dwarf the forces we have seen to date. And that doesn't even take into consideration the protection it offers us from those gigantic warrior robots that Zane is so fond of.

Typhonians upend this equilibrium, or at least have the potential to do so. It is possible that the nature of the Typhonian event curtailed their capabilities, which would account for how exactly so many beings reported to be Typhonian are trapped on one world or another.

In any case, the purpose of this hypothesizing is actually quite concrete - it gives us some guidelines in what we're looking for. Specifically, we are looking for things which are old enough to have passed beyond documentation, and things which have signs of traveling between worlds without using the Stair. This combination does not guarantee we will find Typhonians - no doubt some Echnidnans will trigger these criteria, to say nothing of beings we have not yet accounted for. However, if we do not have some rubric to guide us, then our research becomes whatever's interesting, and as none of us hold tenure, that is simply not an option.

File #27: Ildari

Ildari was very promising at the outset, but was ultimately a cautionary tale in how easy it is to see what you expect to see.

Ildari was originally the name given to a set of artifacts of a particular design, which combined magic and technology in ways that were virtually unheard of elsewhere on the Stair. These artifacts were visually distinctive, and shared numerous traits that indicated common origin, which was odd since they had been found on three different worlds. Further research revealed more than half a dozen artifacts each on different Gossamer Worlds, and that the relics and histories of these worlds were each staggeringly ancient - old enough to have some record of plate tectonics in



Ildari

one case. What's more, the occupants of these worlds shared numerous physical and linguistic characteristics, though their cultures were wildly diverse.

This was enough to merit further study, which led to the really spectacular find: a worldgate. Built using similar magical technology to the artifacts, it was a dramatic looking archway, perhaps thirty feet high and twenty feet wide, and when active, one could step through it and out through a world gate to another world. But what was most baffling about this gate is that it did not resonate at all with the Grand Stair, nor did it have any particular connection with Eidolon or Umbra.

My curiosity got the better of me at this point, and set out to explore the new world that the Worldgate had opened into. While not strictly prepared for the hazards I encountered, including beasts whose like I have never seen, I managed to muddle along until I made an ally. Sophia Fusillade described herself (I didn't ask) as a 'Worldwalker', one who uses and studies the Worldgates.

We traveled for some time, swapping knowledge. The Worldgates were even more extensive than I'd imagined - they reached tens of thousands of known worlds, and

more were discovered every day. An adept, like Sophia, searched for unknown gates, or for secrets to use known gates to go to new worlds.

What's more, the gates were not the only means of world travel available. On three separate occasions we traveled from one world to another by a great vessel of metal and crystal.

It was the vessels that tipped me off. While it was true that there were marvels in Ildari unlike any I've ever seen, the explanation of their apparent powers was far more mundane.

In case you have not guessed by now, Ildari is a star-spanning imperium (or federation, or something), or at least it was in its heyday. While it is currently in a degenerate state, it's fairly clear that it has risen and fallen many times, expanding to new worlds and connecting them with technology and magic. They are currently in a post-apocalyptic period, and it may be thousands of years before they see any kind of unity again, but the relics and powers of past ages remain at hand.

Normally, I would close this file with this discovery, filing Ildari away as little more than a curiosity, but a few key points inspire hesitation.

First, this is the oldest contiguous civilization I have encountered. Their record keeping is spotty, but in places where it works, it goes back tens of thousands of years, maybe farther. It is entirely possible that the Typhonian Event registered there in some way, so I may find records of the even there.

Second, they've reached heights of magic and technology at various points which seem genuinely impossible. I believe they even have discovered the Grand Stair at times, but considered it nothing more than a curiosity. Just ponder that for a moment. I've met Ildarans on my travels whose powers and skill would make them the peer of any Lord of Gossamer & Shadow. Even in a degenerate state, their armies and weapons boggle the mind, and we are fortunate that they have neither the means nor the inclination to explore the Grand Stair (though I may have piqued Sophia's interest).

My greatest fear is that someone like the Great Enemy might turn their eye upon one of their worlds, not realizing the iceberg that it is the tip of. Should it come to conflict - and I do not say this lightly - I would not wager on the Great Enemy's success. They would be facing a cross-world empire even more extensive than their own, bearing powers that are comparable or even superior, with home turf advantage. You see, I don't worry for Ildari. I worry what happens to the rest of us if someone pisses them off enough to see the Grand Stair as a threat.



Sophia Fusillade

Mechanics

Ildari (10 Points, no current owner)

Technology Level	High (Varied)
Magic Level	Known & Belived
Security	Restricted [2 Points] (Doors are rare and often in dangerous locations)
Type	Primal World [4 Points]
Control	None
Realm	Cosmos [4 Points] (see below)
Influence on the Powers:	None

Realms

Sometimes a Gossamer World is more than just one world. Clusters of worlds exist, connected by their own rules. So far as Shadow is concerned, these are still but a single world, it just happens to have more stuff in it, like a ship in a bottle. These additional worlds are still Gossamer Worlds, and bound by their rules. Though the nature of the Realms may be drastically different, depending upon the nature of their arrangement.

Quality	Cost	Description
Secret Realm	1	The world contains passage to a second world, hidden from obvious exploration, but available to a traveller in the known. Examples might include fairylands or an underworld.
Array	2	Effectively named and number worlds, arranged according to some internal logic. The nine (or eight) planets orbiting the sun, connected by spaceships and jumpgates might be one example, as might the nine circles of hell or four elemental planes.
Cosmos	4	Any number of worlds. Not necessarily infinite, but certainly beyond practical counting. Could be a vast interstellar empire or worlds hanging from the branches of Yggdrasil.

GM's Note

Secret Realms and Array's make for interesting anomalies within the scope of the Grand Stair, but Cosmos level realms should invite a certain amount of discussion. While they exist within the larger scope of the Grand Stair, the introduction of another cosmos can radically alter the nature and tone of your game (especially as, from their perspective, the relationship to the stair may be inverse to the one we see). This is not necessarily a bad thing, especially if you want to introduce a radical idea to your Lords of Gossamer & Shadow game without rewriting the setting, but handle it with care.

File #83: Matekai

Start a black file labeled "Matekai" and put this letter in it when you've finished. In this particular case, I may have been more right than I'm entirely comfortable with.

Have you ever seen the photos from Kapaz? It's one of the early black files, what seems to have been an accidental cross-world incursion, one of those random ones in an infinity, events where one world pushed into another for just a moment, to the detriment of both. Matter in one world effectively *pushed* its way into the other, and vice versa. It was not blending, or change, just something like a horribly accelerated tectonic event made of everyday people and things.



The Harbinger

That was what I thought of when we got to the valley of the Maunga - there was a great stone spire made from no material native to this world. My first thought was of Kapaz - it felt similar, like something an event pushed into this world.

What followed was pretty violent and dramatic, but the important thing is that I think we cauterized a wound to the world and prevented further incursion. We probably should check the crater once the fire dies down, in a few decades, but it's hopefully settled out for now. Yay heroics.

What makes this something more than a curiosity is that there was definitely an active agent behind it. That's this guy.

In addition to being a snappy dresser, he called himself "The Harbinger", and yes, he was entirely **that** guy. Monologues, dramatic lighting, disposable minions, the whole kit and caboodle. All the earmarks of an amateur with borrowed power. And while I can afford to be derisive now, I admit, he had a lot of firepower, much more than I expected.

I have rarely been so happy to move someone into the past tense, and while I did not get a chance to

interrogate him directly, it turns out he kept rather extensive journals (of course).

A lot of it was very familiar – angry outsider, scrambling for approval and power, gets contacted by a mysterious being and offered all the power he wants. Agrees, gets revenge on those who wronged him, and starts pursuing the agenda of his master.

This is where it got interesting – usually the mystical patron is some sort of local demon or god. Occasionally it might be a visiting traveller from the Grand Stair using a bit of sleight of hand to gain some local influence. This was none of those, it was a being named Matekai, and it consumes worlds.

Yes, I know that sounds like hyperbole – if I had a horse for every “destroyer of worlds” I’ve met, I’d never stop shoveling crap – but it turns out that this was not the first world that *The Harbinger* (I feel stupider just saying that) had been too. In the previous ones, he had successfully managed to summon Matekai, much to the detriment of the world in question.

But here’s the clincher – one of the worlds he described sounded very familiar. Tellerian’s geography was very distinctive – beautiful jade canyons with winds that made music. I’d never been there, but a very old carta documented it well enough to let me track it down.

Three of four doors are no longer functional, and the last one opens onto a piece of debris in an asteroid field. That was enough to inspire some deeper digging, and another review of the journals.

Matekai may be a genuine Typhonian, but if it is, it’s unlikely to provide much in the way of useful reference. So far as I can tell, it operates at a scale that makes it very hard to judge exactly what it is. It is literally large enough to consume planets, and is exactly the sort of creature who would never be able to take advantage of the Grand Stair to travel. More frankly, I’m unsure this creature is that...sophisticated. It’s powerful, of course, but I don’t think there’s a lot of art or literature at that scale. It must have some means of communication to reach its acolytes, but if our boy was any indication, I am not sure that avenue is much of an option.

And that’s the catch. I’m not sure this guy was the only one out there.

Not saying there are armies of these goons running about, but I think there are more of them, and this is something we need to get the word out about. We can’t be sure that all of them are going to be the same kind of whackjobs this guy was, but I infer from his journals that his trappings were part of the role, so we may be looking for a similar *modus operandi*.

If they’re consistent, one of these guys will set up camp in a world and establish a place of power. Over a period of decades – maybe even centuries – he’ll get embedded enough to be able to start summoning Matekai. That

summoning will take a lot of time and power, and be disruptive to the world. Because of this, he’ll likely choose a world with sparse population and no ties to any active Gossamer Lords.

Assuming they do this far enough off the beaten path, there may be nothing to be done about it. But so long as we’re aware of the possibility, then maybe we can nip a few more of these in the bud.

File #121: Basta

I have occasionally encountered the prospect of biomass penetrating the Grand Stair. It lies at the root of my aversion to snakes – you would be terrified to realize just how big a snake would need to get for a doorway to be a barrier to it. Thankfully, for creatures that are simply large, shutting the door can be a quick solution.

Rather more frightening is the prospect of smaller creature – swarms of insects, fungal growth, to say nothing of microscopic creatures. Thankfully, many of these things will never make it through the Door in the first place. This is a quiet benefit –passing through a Door tends to get rid of a lot of incidental ridealongs – parasites and the like. It’s not perfect - things like the damnable gremlins still manage to get through, but not enough that we constantly need to worry about plagues and grain worms.

This is also one of those areas where the nature of the Grand Stair shapes our experience – the kinds of worlds with the most overwhelming flora and fauna are less likely to have much construction, and in turn, fewer Doors. It would not surprise me if there are worlds out there where the entire ecosystem has a shared intellect, but the Grand Stair is unlikely to open onto any such place.

For all that, Basta comes close. It clearly once had a significant native population, as its landscape is dotted with empty cities, now overgrown by jungle. It’s a dangerous place in many ways, but most notably for the being who gives its name.

Basta is...I suppose in the most technical sense, a plant. An immense plant, the size of a forest. There are other plants of similar size and scope in the world, and Basta was once one of them. Part of the nature of these great plants is that they take in some of the power and knowledge of the things they feed on, and each carries some lore from the world before it fell. In Basta’s case, there was something else there too – an Echidna (perhaps a true Typhonian) or something comparable.

Whatever it is, it awakened a spark in Basta, filling her with knowledge and power, but not necessarily the means to use it – she was still a plant the size of a large town. And so she started experimenting, building and combining smaller forms to give her some mobility, and in time, she sent those out into the Grand Stair.

This is when I met her – when a thousand plants walked onto the Grand Stair and started looking for places to take root. This was poorly received, and what followed was several weeks of hostilities in the face of what seemed to be an invasion. Violence led to violence, and exegesis was no help in settling matters, as the plants had no means of communicating. Things could have escalated further, but a group of Wardens managed to push back through the door and made contact with Basta. It was a little rough at first, but it did de-escalate tensions.

Since then, things have proceeded in an odd but somewhat more stable fashion. Once she realized that the number of plants she was sending disturbed the little animals, she slowed down the process. After all, she was in no hurry. Since then, you will occasionally see one of them travelling the Grand Stair, largely looking to be left alone. They are not uniform in appearance, sometimes incorporating elements of creatures that Basta has absorbed, but their plantlike nature is a bit of a giveaway.

I admit I'm not entirely sure of the mechanic of how the Bastas (as I call them – they have no particular name for themselves) work, but they are in some way part of her. It's not a hive mind, nor are they direct extensions - so far as I can tell they have no ability to communicate back to her when travelling the Grand Stair. Rather, I believe they are created with some fragment of her awareness (and with it, part of her power, thus allowing them to navigate the Stair) and act independently until they return home and are re-absorbed into the primary plant, until such a time they are intelligent and practical, if dispassionate and strange (from our meat-based perspective). As such, they have some sense of self-preservation insofar as it serves their mission, but it's a practical rather than an emotional consideration.

That said, there is a wild diversity among the Bastas. Not only do their physiologies differ based on Basta's whims, their level of intellect and power can vary greatly. So far as I've been able to infer, it is no great problem for her to generate simple beasts, but intelligent, powerful agents take much more work, and there is an entire spectrum between those points. In the original conflict, the distribution seemed hierarchical, with fewer potent Basta providing direction for the more numerous underlings.

In any case, with time and communication, Basta has become a reasonably neutral, sometimes benign force. She would be counted among the Gossamer Lords were she to ever deign to do so, but her interest in that is negligible. What she *is* interested in is a bit of a mystery. Her servants gather samples of flora from many worlds, returning them home for her to study. They also have been known to buy death row prisoners or the recently dead, for disposal on Basta so that their knowledge can be absorbed more directly. This is a bit creepy and



Basta

potentially disturbing, but as yet she has not pushed the matter.

My one concern is that I'm fairly sure she is taking root in other worlds. From time to time, one of the Basta simply plants itself somewhere. If it takes root (not always guaranteed) it becomes a greater basta and must grow and send lesser Basta forth to communicate with the true Basta. This can have massive ecological ramifications, but as yet, we have yet to see any signs of attempted world domination, though there have been conflicts with chainsaw and fire wielding natives. I've attached a list of worlds where we've seen this happen.

All that is interesting in its own right – Basta is a great example of an Echidnan, powerful and old, but explicable within the multiverse we know. Or at least mostly so.

The real reason she merits a Black File is that I don't know what she ate that woke her up, but there are several signs that point to it being a true Typhonian. If it was merely a being of power, I can't imagine it being enough to allow her to do a lot of the things she's done, so that's one indicator. More tellingly, she occasionally drops impossible pieces of knowledge, things which I cannot imagine her knowing. More than one Black File has started based on a passing comment on her part.

The problem, however, is that she has no context for the information. Asking her questions is a nearly fruitless activity because she will only answer so much as she cares, and her cares rarely intersect with those of us tiny animals. This isn't malice, just a profound indifference. For all her power and intellect, she is still a plant, and that makes for very different priorities.

Which is not to say she is not a potentially valuable resource, while you are unlikely to get what you're looking for from her, it is not hard to get *something*. She is happy to trade for things she values (unfamiliar flora and fauna, mostly) but she sees no more value in the hiding place of an ancient weapon, than she does in the name of a long dead pet. Whether you get one or the other is a veritable crapshoot.

I should add – if she really is fueled by a Typhonian, then there is always the danger that she may become a threat someday. If that happens, I strongly suggest severing her core world rather than trying to engage her. She controls or influences the entire biome of her world, and the prospect of going to war when every blade of grass is turned against you should be horrifying. Brute force and fire might carry the day, but I would not lean too heavily on those.

Gossamer World: Basta
(6 Points, Controlled by Basta)

Technology Level	Negligible
Magic Level	Known & Belived
Security	Guarded[4 Points] (Entire Biome dedicated to its defense)
Type Control	Personal Domain [1 Points] Control of Contents [1 Points] Control of the Biosphere allows the world to be shaped.
Realm	None
Influence on the Powers:	None

Basta herself is hard to give stats too because she is effectively a jungle. The stats below are largely for reference of her effectiveness at a given moment, not the entirety of her scope.

Basta

Attributes

- PSYCHE – 125 Points
- STRENGTH – 50 Points
- ENDURANCE – 75 Points
- WARFARE – 50 Points

Powers

- Warden of the Grand Stair (10 Points)
- Sorcery (15 Points)
- Consumption (20 Points) – Basta can learn new powers by consuming something possessing a power. Points allocated to this ability are banked to be spent on any



Greater Basta

such power. If the power costs more, then the process may be disruptive to Basta (reflected as bad stuff).

Spawn of Basta (100 Points) – Basta has a pool of 100 points available with which she can create a variety of creatures. When she creates a spawn, the points are tied up until the creature dies or is reabsorbed. Part of what makes her so dangerous is that she is fully capable of re-absorbing an entire army and creating a new one, customized to face the opponent at hand.

While this ability is effectively free in her homeworld, it has a cost on the stairs – when a spawn is destroyed outside of her ability to recover it, only half its points return to her pool.

These points are often used as follows:

Lesser Basta (32 Points)

- Double Vitality [2 Points]
- Combat Training [1 Point]
- Superior Stamina [1 Point]
- Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]
- Pass Through Door [1 Point]
- Psychic Resistance [1 Point]
- Worldwide [x4 Points]

Greater Basta (36 Points)

Double Vitality [2 Points]
Combat Reflexes [2 Points]
Able to Speak and Reason [2 Points]
Double Damage [2 Points]
Psychic Sensitivity [1 Point]
Psychic Neutral [2 Points]
Immune to Firearms [2 Points]
Search Through Worlds [4 Points]
Self Healing [1 Point]
Named & Numbered [x2]

Stuff: None [0]

Basta as an Ally

Basta is a fickle ally, not because she is unwilling to help, but because her understanding of what help is needed is often flawed. That said, for those she considers friends, she can be a resource for a wide array of random information, and offers one of the more secure bolt holes in the universe. In addition, her knowledge of plants is second to none, and it is one of the most fruitful topics to engage her on.

Basta as an Enemy

It is hard to make an enemy out of Basta, but not impossible. She is largely dispassionate, and an enemy is someone she has simply decided to remove from the board. To this end, she is nearly infinitely patient, willing to take all the time needed to do the job right. It is often overlooked that her abilities also give her very small agents with very lethal poisons, a fact that she does not draw attention to, but is willing to occasionally leverage.

Objectives

Basta's objectives are hard to understand. She wants to grow, certainly, but she is in no rush. Even before she reached her current level of awareness, she was staggering old, and used to thinking in terms of years and seasons rather than days and hours. In the near term, she seems content to learn more about other biospheres and look for places to take root. Should she ever succeed at the later, it's not entirely clear what the consequences of that would be.

Outstanding Files

I haven't had a chance to look into any of these yet, either because they're not convenient or because I think the odds of success are too low. Give them to an intern, or if we don't have any interns, see if you can find someone fresh faced and enthusiastic who's willing to see it as valuable life experience. Not Veronique, though – I have her looking into the damned spiders.

- I've gotten 17 different reports of people encountering "golden butterflies" on the Stair. That's strange enough, but it's reported that they seem to fly to certain doors and, if those doors are opened, fly through and lead any follower to another door. Any Warden will recognize the pattern as worldwalking, but I'd like to know where the little buggers are going.



"Golden Butterfly"



The Back Office

- We've found records of one of the early races encountered by the Great Enemy. Insect warriors of some sort, they had apparently built a formidable little empire. They were, reportedly, wiped out. But someone showed me some drawings from Kosnica, and they look a hell of a lot like one of Drake's units. Now, maybe it's a coincidence, or maybe Drake has been quietly sitting on something that knows a lot more about the Great Enemy than we do. I need someone to go to Kosnica and find out more.
- I've been seeing more acolytes of Kula on the Grand Stair lately. Rumor has it they keep the body of their god somewhere, and gain the power to walk the tair by eating part of it. Disgusting, yes, but potentially very useful. Doubly so if, as the rumor suggests, they cut the slices off his still-living form – if his flesh has that kind of power, that's no local deity.
- I die a little bit every time I say these words, but Zane may be right about something. If the Nightmare Realm travels untethered from world to world, then it would be useful to find out a lot more about it. Of course, the odds of actually doing so are pretty low, but anyone dumb enough to take this gig has marked themselves as expendable.

The Back Office

I love the act of finding out new things, but I can be less committed to the actual bookkeeping end as I get older. To this end, I have recruited an aide who serves as the primary keeper and protector of the Black Files. In her own Gossamer World, Lady Kitabu who the locals worshiped as a goddess of knowledge and secrets. I

bested her, bound her by her true name, and put her to use. That is, at least, the story I am keeping to, publicly.

The reality is a little more nuanced. Those are some of the facts, but I released the binding and offered her a bargain instead – more knowledge than she knew what to do with in return for working with me, a bargain she finds most satisfactory.

It took many decades for the relationship to develop into one of genuine trust, but develop it did. When encountered publically, she delights in playing up the Girl Friday/bound spirit of knowledge relationship (partly because it maintains a valuable secret, partly because it profoundly embarrasses me). When not in that persona, she may well be found in one of dozens of meticulously crafted guises, but is mostly in the hidden library that we've nicknamed The Back Office. While she will occasionally travel the Grand Stair, she has never mastered the art, and is largely dependent on my assistance in doing so.

Lady Kitabu

Attributes

PSYCHE – 65 Points
 STRENGTH – Paragon
 ENDURANCE – 10 Points
 WARFARE – Paragon

Powers

Sorcery (15 Points)
 Umbra Mastery (50 Points)

Mentor (2 Points) – Kitabu’s relationship with Lucien has been fruitful for both of them, and so far as she’s concerned, he has more than held up his end of the bargain.

Artifacts & Creatures

Robe of the Emerald Peacock (18 points) – In its natural form, this emerald robe is a key part of her library, but it is also an important part of her magic and protection. Most critically, it can reshape itself into whatever clothes she needs for her current form.

Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons [4 Points]

Limited Shapeshifting [4 Points]

Self Healing [1 Point]

Psychic Neutral [2 Points]

Convey Psychic Neutral Quality [5 Points]

The Seekers (18 Points) – These grey birds were her eyes and ears on her home world, but their lack of thumbs has made them less useful in that role, so instead they are her primary companions and familiars. They also serve a very practical purpose- in addition to allowing her to hang a wide array of spells, they can also cast those spells, resulting in very literal storms of sorcery.

Combat Training [1 Point]

Resistant to Normal Weapons [1 Point]

Hang and Cast Spells [4 Points]

Horde Quantity [x3]

The Black Keychain (18 Points) - A gift from Lucien, this artifact allows her to navigate the stair with some facility. More importantly, it allows her to find her way back to the Back Office. Normally, it appears as a key ring of black keys – The exact nature and shape of these keys change over time, even as they are being used, and there are very few doors they will not open (the only exception being Doors with a specific Key). It also has a secret form, a silver key which can only be called out with a secret name. This form allows access to the Back Office.

Alternate Form [1 Point] (technically redundant with Limited shapeshift, but it’s true form is a hidden feature)

Limited Shapeshifting [4 Points]

Mold Gossamer Matter [1 Point]

Follow Path [2 Points]

Confer Follow Path Power [10 Points]

Domain

The Back Office (9 Points) – Secret repository of the Black Files, it’s not entirely clear where this World is located. It’s a constrained space, an abandoned university now filled with Kitabu’s library, and it seems likely that it may actually be somewhere in the Labyrinth. It is unlikely that anyone but Lucien could find such a place, but he has given the key to Kitabu.

- Private Domain (1 Point)
- Control of Destiny (4 Points)
- Guarded (4 Points)

Stuff: Good [+2 Points]



Lady Kitabu

Kitabu as an Ally

Kitabu is a useful, if indirect, ally. Her assistance tends to manifest as mysterious messages delivered at just the right time (though her sense of the theatrical does occasionally demand that she give some direct help while in disguise). That said, Kitabu’s good regard is not the same thing as her trust.

Kitabu as an Enemy

Kitabu is not a fighter. Even her capable sorceries are more directed towards deception and escape than conflict, and she is unlikely to ever come after an enemy directly. Instead, she will find out everything she can about him, and make sure that information ends up in the worst possible place.

Objectives

Kitabu’s main concern is in maintaining the Black Files and growing her own knowledge. Her current situation is quite satisfying to her, giving her access to sufficient knowledge tempered by ample opportunities for entertainment and deception.

The one bit of sand in the gears is that Kitabu is intensely resentful of her dependence on Lucien to navigate the Stairs. As such, her research into other means of travel has a personal motivation, and while she would never be tricked into betraying Lucien, she might make some poor decisions if the possibility of travel was presented to her.