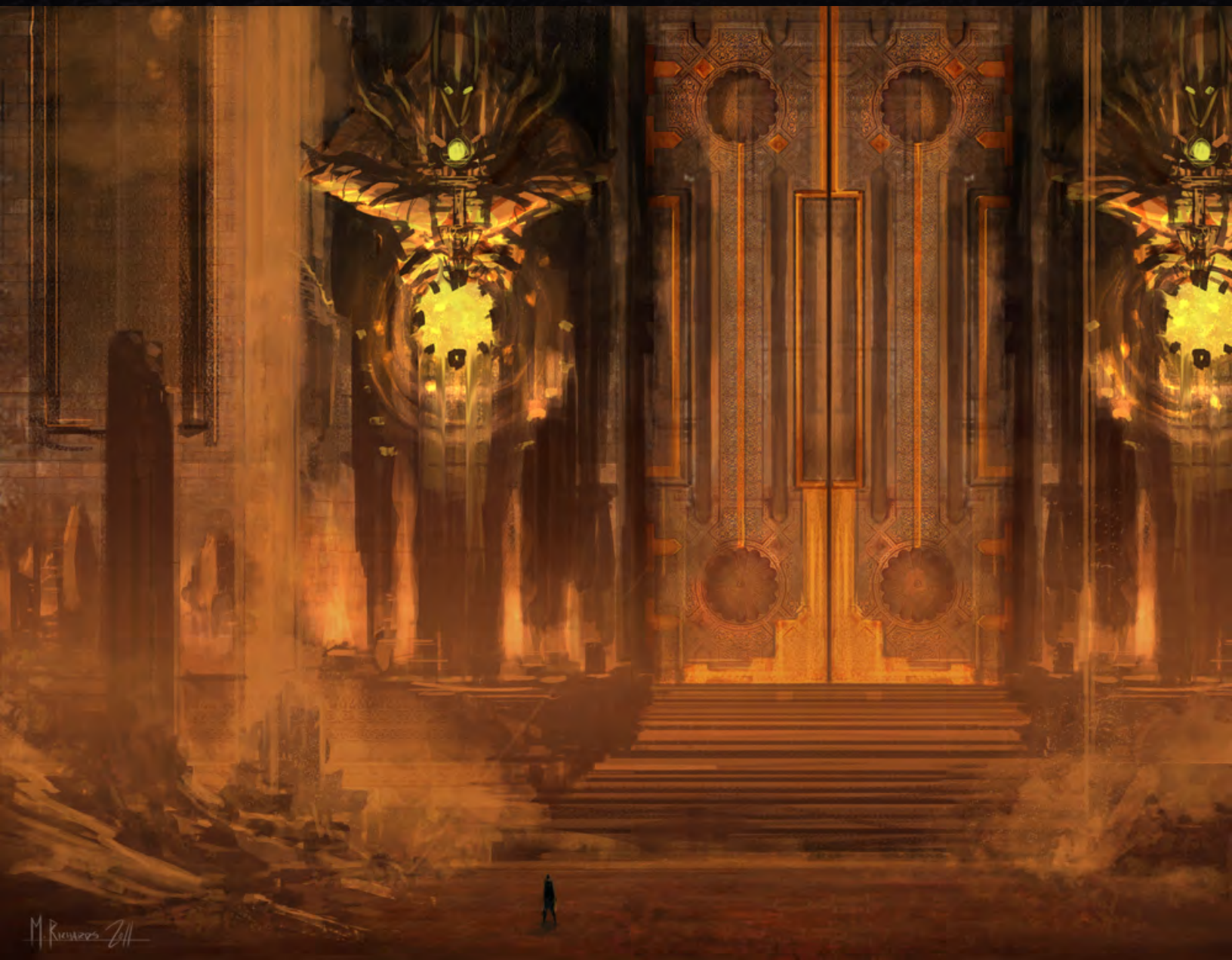


Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Lucien's Guide: Legends & Lies



M. Riemers 2/11



by Rob Donoghue





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Lucien's Guide: Legends & Lies

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I sit down to compose this largely because I am sick and tired of answering the same questions over and over again. Apparently being borderline transcendent beings capable of striding across the cosmos does not make us immune to the lure of folklore. I have no idea what makes these particular stories so resilient - some of them are based on events which are so far outside of living memory that I can't even imagine who perpetuates them.

But for all that, I cannot pretend that they have no value. Some of these stories are merely twisting of real or important things. The memory of Gilead, for example, will likely be with us for a long time, and it behooves us to see that it mutates as little as possible. Other tales are the sharp point of larger stories, thing which might reasonably be called the Warden's domain.

And so I present you a collection of some of the more pernicious tales I have encountered in my travels up and down the Stair. They may offer you some useful insights, but at the very least they may spare you from looking like an untutored novice when someone speaks of the Paladin of Gilead, or tells a war story about dealing with The Incursion.

Doorghuls

The Legend: There are shapeshifting creatures - Januavores, or "Doorghuls" - who inhabit the Stair who can take the form of doors. Indistinguishable under normal inspection. Should you step through one, you are taking one way trip into its belly, never to be seen again.

The Truth: I start with this one because while it's mostly nonsense, it's incredibly persistent.



So, first and foremost, there are no such creatures. They would either need to contain otherworldly space within them (which I'm confident is not possible within the Stair) or have very thin stomachs indeed. Doors turning into fangy maws and drawing in prey with giant tongues makes for fanciful tales, but has no real substance behind it.

Which is not to say that there are no predators which take advantage of the nature of the stair. Even if you set aside Zane's crazy ass theory about predator worlds, there are more mundane dangers which may inspire this.

Setting aside the simple mundane threat of dangerous creatures living on the other side of a door, some worlds have documented predators which are very but capable of wrapping themselves around their prey like a blanket. These creatures are usually capable of blending into their environs, taking the form of a floor or

ceiling, and it's entirely possible one could take the form of a Door.

This is not to say that it's time to start stabbing every door you see, just in case. Setting aside that a warden should be able to trivially penetrate this deception, the simple reality is that the stair is not friendly to long term habituation, even by strange shape-shifting door creatures. And more, such creatures would have no way to get to the stair on their own, so it's possible that a Warden with a strange sense of humor might seed a stretch of the Stair with this sort of creature, it would require fairly regular maintenance for them to be any kind of persistent threat.

The Fall of Gilead

The Legend: Gilead was the last shining beacon of hope in the universe, but it was betrayed and fell to the Dwimmerlaik. A handful of Paladins still wander the Stair, righting wrongs, and they are all that is left of the great silver empire. But some say Gilead is not fallen, merely lost, and the Paladin's seek it to this day. Further, it is said, in our darkest hour, Gilead will return,

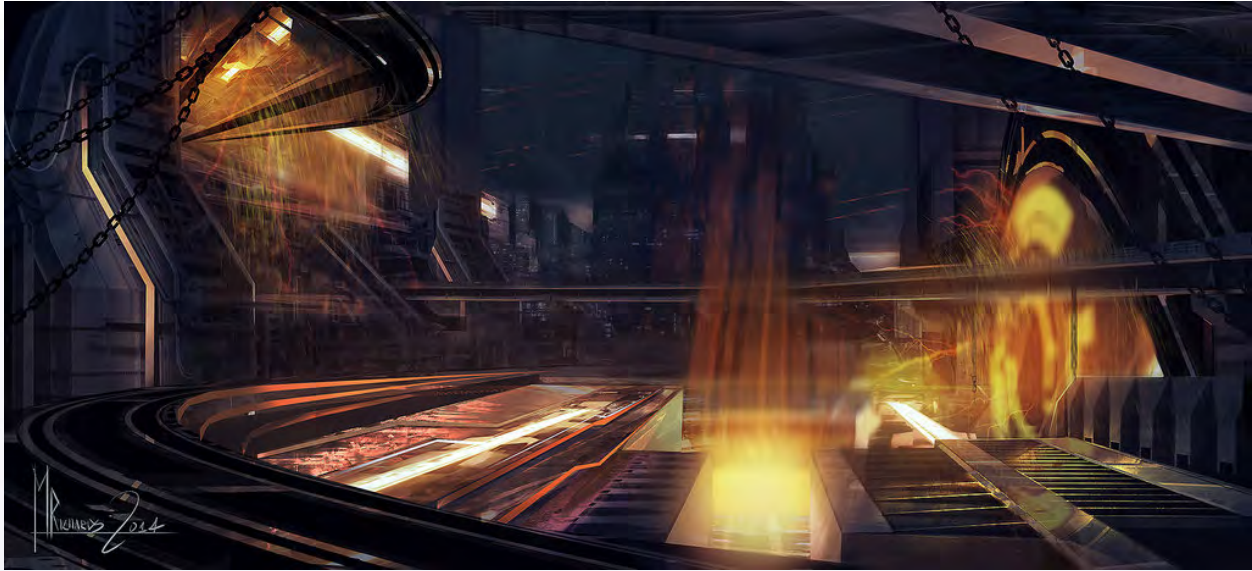
The Truth: The Protectorate of Gilead was ancient and well into decline when the Dwimmerlaik struck. It did not survive the conflict. The eldest Lords can still tell you what it was like to walk Gilead's silver halls in its days of glory, and their stories are always bittersweet, for its loss is something they still feel. To some of them, we Lords today are the heirs of Gilead, and how we have lived up to that mantle is a subject of some debate. Of course, to others, Gilead is just one more dead world. I express no opinion on the subject, but I do caution that it is a topic to broach with care.

Gilead proper was a world with thousands of Doors upon it, and they had extended true rulership into a handful of other worlds, beyond their borders. More often, however, their presence on other worlds was invited as these worlds came under Gilead's protection, offering a small amount of tribute in return for protected trade between worlds and protection from the Paladins of Gilead against any external threat. As Gilead controlled the bulk of travel, it was rare and difficult for worlds to come into conflict, and conflicts within a given world were largely treated as internal affairs.

Of course, that works better on paper than in practice. One simply cannot maintain a structure that complicated without edge cases and exceptions, and over time the Protectorate had to commit more and more resources to maintaining stability. That curtailed growth and, paired with the difficulty in the training of Paladins, eventually lead to a decline, as worlds left the Protectorate. It was a slow process, taking place over generations, and by the time the Dwimmerlaik threat arose, all the Protectorate encompassed was a few hundred worlds.

Which is not to say they did not put up a hell of a fight. Records are a mess, but there's a good chance that Gilead was fighting the Dwimmerlaik before others ever recognized the threat. As battles spread, there were many worlds that were saved by the timely arrival of a dropship of Paladins, and their fights still echo in legends. Had Gilead stood, it is possible that the Dwimmerlaik would have been stopped cold, which is why its fall was such a blow.

And, frustratingly, we still don't entirely understand how it happened. What we know is this - The Dwimmerlaik attacked



Gilead directly and Gilead's forces were withdrawn from other fronts to face this threat. It looked like a desperate gambit on the Dwimmerlaik's part, for the cost of taking Gilead would be immense, but it was a feint.

At the time, it was known that the Dwimmerlaik had the power to break doors and sever worlds, and they had used this to good effect in certain key battles. However, our expectation had been that it would be impossible to sever at world like Gilead. With its thousands of doors, no amount of effort would make it a practical undertaking. Yet somehow they managed it. Over the course of an afternoon, perhaps even a single moment, every door to Gilead went dead.

A handful of travelers escaped Gilead that afternoon, and their stories are interesting but hard to distinguish from the thousands of frauds and shysters selling tales of the last days of Gilead or promising maps to fantastic treasures smuggled out before the fall. By reports, there was some amount of atmospheric disturbance (red skies, thunderstorms) but more troubling are

recurring stories of a traitor and defenses that did not do their job. The implications of that last are a little off-putting, because if it's true, then that traitor could still well be among us.

There are a lot of theories about what happened. One possibility is that the world was simply destroyed. That is certainly conceivable - there are weapons and beings that are capable of this, but such things are rarely deployed without significant effort and even more significant secondary effects. I cannot imagine it happening so cleanly, even if Gilead's defenses were truly down.

A second possibility is that we have greatly underestimated the Dwimmerlaik's power, and that this is simply something they can do. That is a terrifying thought, and I need to be careful that I don't dismiss this option because I don't **want** it to be true.

Upon consideration, I would say it is not impossible, but there are substantial qualifiers to consider. Cutting off all of a world's doors simultaneously could not be done from the stair. It would need to be performed from the world being cut off,

which means that if this happened, then the means may have been lost along with Gilead. If it was something unique - an artifact or the like - then this was truly a one shot threat. If it was something more than the price must have been substantial, for the Enemy have not used anything on that scale since.

A third possibility is that it was not the Dwimmerlaik at all, but rather Gilead's doing. It may sound mad on the surface of things, it is not an unreasonable contingency plan - if an external threat becomes too dangerous, put a killswitch on the doors of your world. Perhaps the Dwimmerlaik got too close, and Gilead's king decided that this was the only way to preserve his world.

Certainly, Gilead could have done this. To this day, many of their marvels have not been replicated, and at the very center of their power, with any amount of time to prepare? I have no trouble envisioning it.

Still, for all its tragedy, the fall of Gilead may have been for the best. Even in decline, their power was immense, and I have little faith that their decline would have continued peacefully. These things tend to end in explosions of violence and invasion, and I doubt Gilead would have been any different. Without the Dwimmerlaik, perhaps we'd be fighting a very different war today.

Grim thoughts, but they lead to one that may be grimmer. Assuming Gilead was not destroyed, then it is still out there somewhere, in the vastness of the cosmos. It is still a seat of immense power, and there were still substantial Dwimmerlaik forces on the world when it fell. What shape is that world in now? Whoever holds the world has had time to gather power, knowing that there are other worlds out

there, but not knowing what has transpired there. Imagine all that could happen in such a place. And then imagine what would happen should a door ever open again - perhaps it would be a return of long lost allies, but perhaps it would be an entirely new threat.

As to the Paladins - Gilead's power might loosely be described as a union of technology and sorcery, but with such sophistication that the very comparison is crude, like describing a violin a union of dead trees and dead cats. It most often took the form of metals which changed forms freely in accordance to the needs of the user. The quality of their work is such that Gilead blades - which can take the form of numerous weapons - are still functioning and highly prized throughout the star.

This flexibility was part of how they could project their power into other worlds. A lone traveller with a single metal "Seed" could plant it on another world and grow a great silver mosque overnight. These mosques were centers of immense power, which in turn could be tapped by the Paladins.

Which leads to the Paladin. Figures out of legend, clad in armor of Gilead silver, a single Paladin was like a walking engine of destruction, wielding arcane fires, less arcane projectiles and molecular-edged blades as the circumstances called for it. Adherents to a strict code, the Paladins were almost custom made to be larger than life.

And to answer your question, yes, a few still remain. A few hundred were not present on Gilead when it fell for one reason or another, and a few score survived the subsequent conflict. Those who remain today are relics. Age will not claim them



while they are bound to their armor, but it is said that madness has taken more than a few. Some try to find purpose in upholding the code, others quest for a way back to Gilead - a secret door, a lost relic, a dark tower. Some guard the handful of remaining silver mosques.

Those in the know show them hospitality when they pass, out of memory of what has been lost. Those who get in their way tend to see a bad outcome.

Rules

Artifacts of Gilead provide an excellent backstory for any item with a shapeshifting property, as well as a distinctive physical appearance. A character in possession of such an artifact may have a tie to Gilead, or

may simply have acquired it through other means. Any artificer who has been around the stairs long enough will be familiar with Gilead artifacts, and probably have seen a few lesser ones.

Of course, a weapon that can change shape is no great thing when compared to the armor of a Paladin. Now, each Paladin's armor is unique in ways that are apparent to them, but they share numerous similar qualities - it takes a humanoid shape of a uniform color (silver I most common, but some have distinctive hues) with smooth, liquid lines. The armor shifts to produce appropriate armament, and also provides incredible protection and mobility. It also keeps its owner alive, however much they may come to wish otherwise.

Paladin Armor (57 Points)

- Pass Through Door (1 Point*)
- Immense Vitality (4 Points)
- Deadly Damage (4 Points)
- Engine Speed (4 Points)
- Combat Mastery (4 Points)
- Tireless Stamina (4 Points)
- Immense Vitality (4 Points)
- Psychic Neutral (2 Points)
- Invulnerable to Conventional Weapons (4 Points)
- Danger Sensitivity (2 points)
- Regeneration (4 Points)
- Limited Shapeshift (4 Points)
- Convey Regeneration (10 Points)
- Convey Psychic Neutral (5 Points)

* - Before Gilead Fell, Paladin's could Search Through Worlds, always able to return home, but that is no longer the case.

Traditionally, a Paladin and her armor are bound for life, but that does not mean that there are no exceptions. It is not inconceivable that a Paladin may find a squire and find some way to pass on her armor. It is even possible that some seeds for Paladin armor are still in existence, though what one would have to do to get such a thing is an open question.

Should a character follow this path, it is entirely possible that their armor will not be a full Paladin levels when they start out (which is to say, it may be made with rather fewer points). In that case, the stats above reflect the items potential, whether or not the character ever achieves it.

The Darkened Doors

The Legend: There are doors (sometimes 7, sometime times 17, the stories change)



that can be found along the stair that no force will open. Each is distinct, but they are recognizably similar, and the greatest mystery of the universe lies behind them, if only the key can be found.

The Truth: This one is fairly easy to punch a hole in when you start asking for specifics. Almost everyone traveling the stairs has heard of the darkened doors, but the number who can say they've seen one is vanishingly small.

Which is just as well, because they're real, and they scare the crap out of me.

I don't pretend to know how many of these there are, but there really are doors which cannot be opened, at least not without efforts that I would deem unwise. For any warden, even a highly skilled one, this is daunting. We are used to being masters of the Doors, and while we may be used to the idea that another Warden may attempt to bar our way, the idea that a door will simply not bend to our will is a trifle humbling.

When I was younger, I spent a lot of time and energy worrying about these, and I had

a lot of theories about them, but over time I boiled them down to two possibilities. The first was that they had been sealed by some manner of Ur-Warden, and the inability to open them was a function of a difference in power. The second was that they had been sealed - somehow - from the other side.

If they seal off something dangerous, then whoever did it knew enough about the doors to make me look like a child by comparison. So, obviously, that's unlikely. But if so, then what in the world would such a being need to seal? Either something private, or something really, really, really bad.

If they've been sealed from the inside, that's even stranger, especially if they all go to the same world. Who lives on such a world that would do such a thing?

Many questions, and I like none of the possible answers. And these days, while it might be *possible* that I could force one of these doors open, it is more and more clear what a terrible idea that is.

Which is not enough to keep someone else from trying, so for this one, take my advice - if you encounter a giant, ominous door that you can't open, just let it be. You have the rest of the universe waiting for you. All it asks is a little restraint.

And if you can't show that restraint, then consider that it's entirely possible that I've been randomly locking doors that go to horrible hellscapes solely to reduce the lifespan of wardens lacking in that restraint. Not to say I've done any such thing of course. Merely that it's *possible*.

The Drowned Expanse

Legend: If you delve the stairs far enough, then you will find places where it is friendly to other life and architecture. Great expanses of stair are submerged in water, lined with crystal and coral, with doors that open beneath the oceans of a thousand worlds.

The Truth: I actually rather wish this one were true. And like anything that posits "far enough", I cannot rule it out completely. The Stairs are infinite and no one has seen everything. But this is sufficiently at odds with everything we've seen that I consider it highly unlikely.

The closest I've ever seen is an expanse set up like a canal where locks lead to boat docks where one finds doors, and another expanse submerged in two or three feet of brackish black water. I will not tell you where these are, for reasons which will become apparent, the first because I made a promise, the second because it's a terrible place. The whole of the second area is misty and unpleasant smelling, footing is treacherous, by and large it's not a place you want to spend much time. But both have one other important quality: They are impossible.

Whatever mechanism keeps the stair reasonably free of detritus should, by all rights, have dried these areas right up by now. And even if it didn't, the water should largely have just flowed away by now. Neither of these things has happened.

The first time I encountered this, it offended me so much that I found a fairly flat stretch of the stair and *tried* to flood it, even a little. I got it wet, certainly, but that was the extent of it. Maddening. So I went through every door in the damnable sunken expanse looking for some manner

of explanation of what in the hells was afoot. I found suggestions, but no answers. But I also found something else entirely.

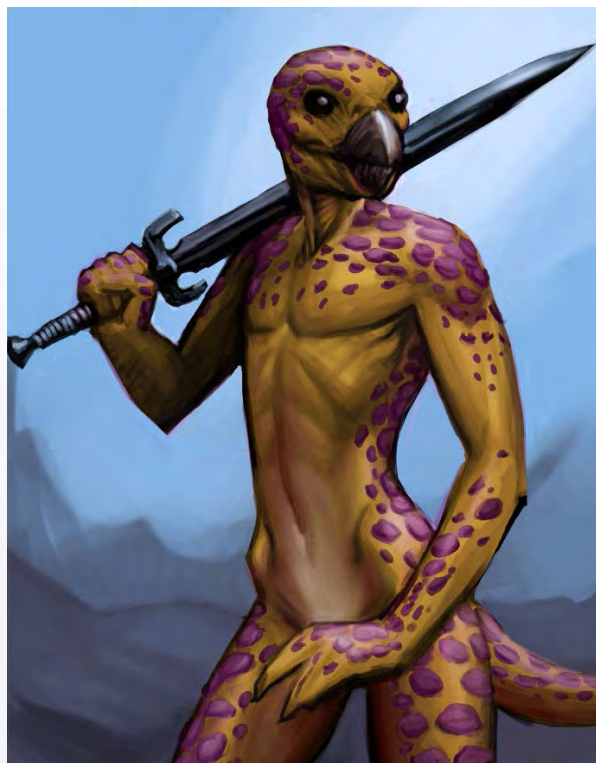
There were approximately forty doors in both areas, and at first, I thought they all lead to the same world, as the destinations were all similar (rocky, coastal regions), but that was not the case. Rather, they were all worlds that had at one time or another shared a common culture. There were ruins and artifacts suggesting this, yes, but also there were the Notar - lizard-like hunters who seemed equally comfortable underwater and in the air.

I passed some time with them, listen to some of their myths and legend but gave it no great thought until the migration season came and they simply walked through the door, across the stair and into another world, as if it were no strange thing.

Let me be clear - there was no leader or shaman opening the door or showing the way. No ritual or artifact giving guidance. They just walked.

Consider the implications of this - they are an entire people capable of navigating the Stair *naturally*. I spent more time among them, met other tribes and nations, and they tolerated my strange inquiries. The more I studied, the more the results were consistent - so far as I can tell, the Notar are *born* with the ability to navigate the stair.

From what I can piece together, they were bred by an ancient race - the Stavitel - for exactly this purpose. Judging by Notar legends, they were masters of life. Rather than build tools or cast spells, they bred creatures to serve their needs. They bred giant leviathans to fight, cunning



crustaceans to build their cities, and the Notar to go places they could not.

I've not had the time or resources to look into this much further, but the implications are fascinating, and the question of the fate of the Stavitel is one that occasionally bothers me. But I am no deep sea explorer, and I am likely not the man to solve this mystery.

The Old Ones

The Legend: Out there, in the space beyond darkness, beyond the Umbra and Eidolon, lie the Old Ones, unknown and unknowable, tentacled horrors for whom our existence is merely a fever dream and who will inevitable consume us all.

The Truth: Utter bullshit.

Look, there are terrible things out there. Things we don't understand. Even

tentacled eldritch horrors. No question at all.

But the idea that these things are somehow foundational to our universe, or exist beyond it, is the construct of a weak, alien-fearing mind. It is the view of one who cannot make peace with what they cannot understand, and responds with fear. It is petty and small, and we are better than that.

This is not to say you can just pretend awful things don't exist. They do. But don't give them any more weight than they deserve.

The Incursion

Legend: Beware the Incursion. They will come to your world as traders and scholars, but in time they will reveal themselves as metal-masked conquerors. They have no need for magic, as their science can carve through the walls of worlds and their weapons are undeterred by the rules of reality.

The Truth: Speaking as a sorcerer, we have our heads pretty far up our asses about technology. The reasons for this are pretty self-evident once you think about it - beyond a certain threshold, almost any individual problem is more easily solved with magic than science. And since any sorcerer with an inkling of the Stair probably is past a certain threshold, it's only natural to go with the tool that's going to work with the least effort.

That leads to a blind spot. As much as magic is the tool of the moment, technology is the tool of the long game. It is built on distribution and re-use. Magical solutions tend to be one offs, while technical ones tend to be iterative. What

does that mean? Consider - if I want to drop a rock in a certain time and place, then I could craft a spell to do that with maybe a few hours of effort. If I want to do it with science then I need to do a lot of measuring, maybe invent the computer to do the math, and eventually drop the rock. It could take years, maybe even generations, depending on my starting point.

But the trick reveals itself in the *second* rock. I can make another spell, another few hours, no big deal. But the science guy? He can retune his system, build on the work he's already done, and maybe drop the new rock in much less time. And the next one will be faster. And the next one faster still. Eventually, they build a tool to automate rock dropping, and give it controls that any goon can use, and now they've got a thousand guys dropping rocks every 30 seconds, all aside from the other secondary benefits they've reaped from building this thing.

This is not to say one or the other is better in some way. We all have our biases. But we're all very familiar with the new traveller on the stairs who gets eaten by something unpleasant because his blast-o-tron 9000 doesn't work. So much so that we tend to dismiss him and his ilk, considering the Stair and its worlds to be far more a function of magic than science. And perhaps that tends toward true, but it is not the whole truth.

First, the universe is not much friendlier to magic than it is to technology. Consider the necessity of lynchpins to the workings of sorcery. The mightiest of archmages is going to be as helpless as our blast-o-tron wielder if they think their magics will protect them on another world without adaptation.

Second, there is a very important gap between difficult and impossible. And into that gap steps the Incursion.

The Incursion's home world was actually a collection of worlds, similar in scope to The Black, but rather less diverse (possibly by chance, but more likely by virtue of brutal history). The primary leadership was a highly militaristic interstellar empire. Importantly, while they were technologically sophisticated, they were hardly transcendentally so. We've seen records and evidence of worlds where technology advanced to the point of indistinguishability from magic with their weaponized black holes, sphere worlds, lenses and bizarre math, but the Incursion were none of these. They had understandable science - space ships, robots, energy weapons and so on.

And when they discovered The Stair, the results were predictable - squadrons or armored space marines were torn to pieces when they engaged "primitive" forces armed with weapons that actually worked. For most would be conquerors, that would be the beginning and the end of things, but for the Incursion, this was exactly the challenge they needed. They were warriors, certainly, but they were not warriors who prized strength, they prized *logistics*, and the stair was just one more such problem.

What followed was an utterly methodical expansion. They explored aggressively, mapping the Stair extensively. Where they encountered resistance or challenges, they withdrew, made a note and moved on. When they found opportunity, they took it, establishing settlements on other worlds which were well-supported and dedicated to research.

As a scholar, I admit some envy at the extent of this effort. To my knowledge,



there has never been a comparable effort at cataloging the scientific vagaries of individual worlds, and any remnants of their research would be incredibly valuable (to me at the very least). It is said that they even inferred the existence of the Umbra and Eidolon from their studies, but took little note in them as tangential to their practical interests.

Over time, this research was collated, studied and - most critically - applied, specifically to the development of technology. Weapons and armor, yes, but also utilities like communication and transportation. In worlds that supported it, they took to space, building new empires

from their point of incursion. In worlds they valued, they deployed troops, and this time, their weapons and armor worked just fine. They were careful not to pick fights they could lose (which included steering clear of any Lords they encountered), but when drawn into conflict with such beings, they responded with overwhelming force. They did not overreach, maintained their holdings well, and showed no sign of faltering.

Yet falter they did. Slowly at first, then all at once, like falling dominoes. Their communication network between worlds (always tenuous, for the necessity of passing through The Stair) was the first to fall, and in its absence, things quickly splintered. They did not vanish, but in the absence of a unifying drive, each world was forced to establish its own fate. Some could not survive without Incursion support. Others survive to this day, in one form or another, often recognizable by some remnant of Incursion design or iconography. It is even possible that some are fully intact - those that took to the stars after passing through the Doors are hard to speak of with any authority.

So what happened? Apparently the universe has a sense of humor, because the answer is "magic", but not in the usual sense. As it turned out, the Incursion's research had also given them all the information they needed to get a pretty solid grasp on the workings of magic too. Initially, it was not pursued as it offered little advantage to the Incursion as a whole, but eventually, someone wanted a shortcut. Someone important in the Incursion turned to magic to promote his personal agenda, which forced others to do the same. What followed was something of an arms race that culminated in a brutal civil war.

I'm not sure what of the original Incursion still remains. It's possible that they destroyed themselves. It's also possible that a handful of magic wielding god kings command armies prepared for transworld combat and will be returning their attention to the stair once local matters are sorted out. There are other possibilities too, but that last one is what comes to mind when I'm trying to sleep at night.

The Infinite Door

The Legend: The ancient and powerful archwarden Zandalee built a door which could be tuned to connect to any door on the Stair, allowing her to reach any world She is gone, but if you can find the door and decipher its many dials and settings, then you too can get anywhere.

The Truth: So, let me just say I really like the totally-made-up-term "archwarden", and I may have to start putting that on my calling cards. Beyond that, this is pretty much poppycock, and it's interesting mostly because it has shown up in a huge number of forms and variations. The name of the creator changes, the description and details change, but the story keeps popping up in one for or another.

Some might take that as a sign that there's some hint of truth behind it, but I think it's more likely that it's a sort of self-perpetuating stupidity. I suspect every artificer worth his salt has tried to make something like this. The universal door is to Wardens roughly what the philosopher's stone is to alchemists - an ideal rather than something to be taken literally. But there will always be fools with too much time and not enough understanding of metaphor, so I don't expect these stories to go away any time soon.

Lost Eggs

The Legend: Dragons are ancient and powerful beings who have navigated the stair longer than any race, and perhaps are the original creators. When the time comes for them to reproduce, they will secret an egg in some faraway world. What hatches from the egg will resemble the natives of the world and have no inkling of its true nature. But it will also be possessed of great natural power, and in time will be sure to find its way to the Stair, where they will continue grow in power before someday discovering their true power.

The Truth: Ok, here's the first truth – anything that anyone tells you about dragons needs to be viewed with extreme skepticism, and that includes this. There are Wardens who have dedicated their not-inconsiderable lives to the study, cataloging and occasional combat with dragons. Even the respectable scholars among their number could come to no consensus on the true nature of dragons – the creatures simply take too many forms across the many worlds.

Yes, obviously, there is *something* to be found out about dragons. Probably many somethings. There definitely have been dragons who could do things like shapeshift and travel the stair, and if you ask them, they will no doubt tell you stories that frame themselves as masters of the stair. And of course, you can **absolutely** trust their version of things.

So, given all this, I suppose this story is no more preposterous than any other. Certainly there are beings born on out of the way worlds who discover unexpected or inexplicable powers and in turn find their way to the stair. Hell, you probably know a few. But there is nothing that



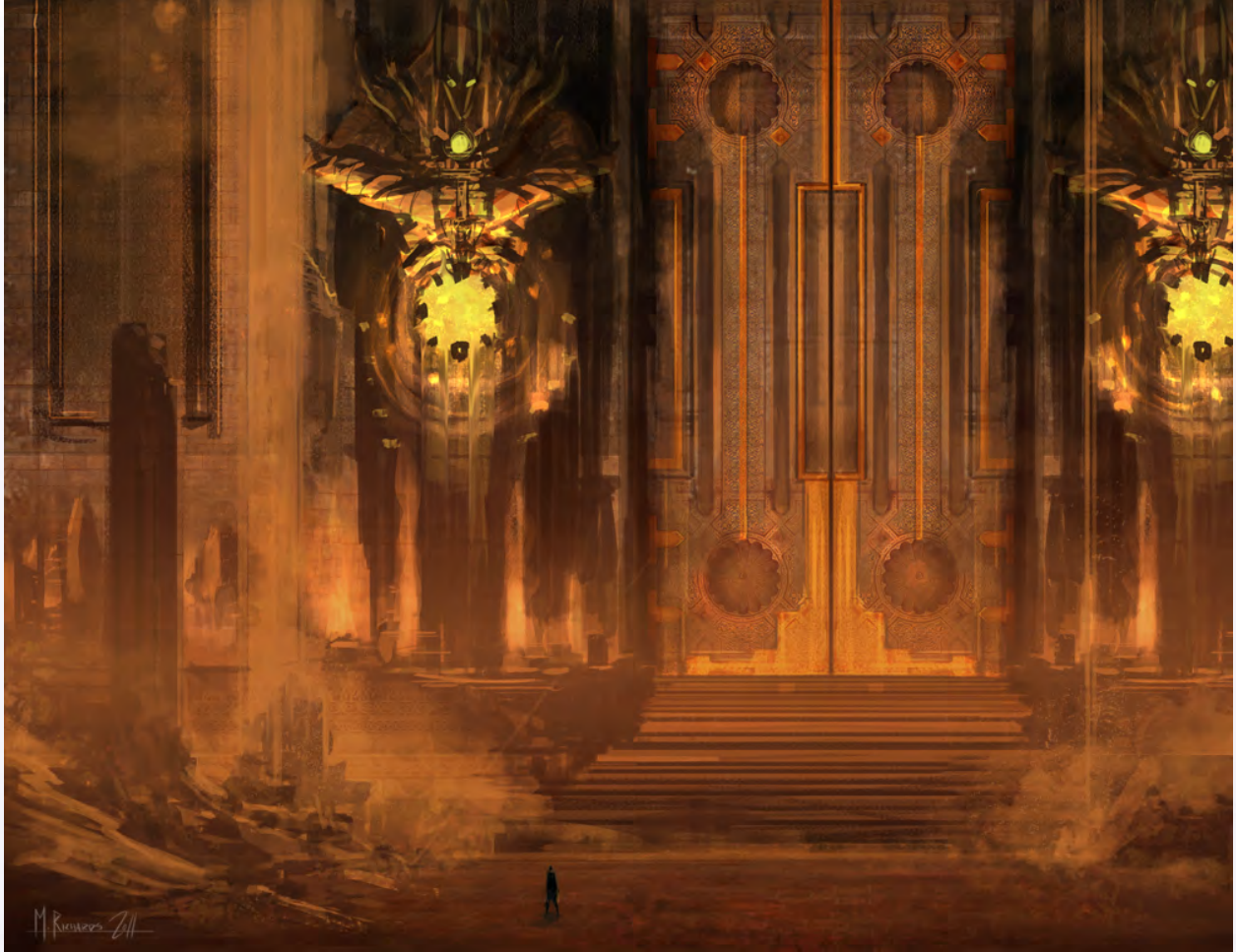
demands that this have a particularly draconic explanation.

Short form – once you start talking about dragons, stick to what you've seen with your own eyes. Nothing is less reliable than a secondhand dragon.

The God's Passage

The Legend: Far along the stair you will come to a place where the hall grows wider and taller, until you can no longer see one side from the other, and the ceiling is so far up that it looks like the sky. The way is a vast dusty plane, and the doors to each side tower out of sight, sized for gods and titans, no mere men. They do not budge, even for Wardens, for beyond them lie the realms of the divine.

The Truth: Setting aside the poetic license, there is actually some truth to this one. The stair is not miles wide, as this description might suggest, but is several hundred feet across and high, and each "step" is easily three hundred feet long, and thirty feet up from the previous one. There



are handholds, so it's navigable with effort, but not the sort of thing to do casually.

Interestingly, the story is also right about the dust. There's a red tinge to the light, and the dust is ever-present here, getting into everything and carrying a faintly rusty odor. There's no breeze to move it, but it seems to shift when you're not looking. The effect is off-putting, and it's made worse by the doors.

Most of the doors along this length are large, but not unreasonably so. But there are a half dozen exceptions, portals ranging from 60 to more than 200 feet high. Each is ornate, and many of them are flanked with guardian statues or similar decorations. But despite the rumor, there

is nothing out of the ordinary about the doors themselves, and they will open to a Warden as easily as anything else, though there's a certain dramatic slowness to it.

Obviously, this makes me a bit nervous. I've remarked in the past that the small scale of the doors protects us from a certain category of menace, and the kinds of things that could come through doors of this size could be quite dangerous indeed. So with that in mind, I've investigated each of these doors and found they share a curious commonality - each goes to a dead world under a great red sun. Perhaps they are the same world, perhaps not - I'm not entirely sure. I wonder if, perhaps, these are tombs of a sort. They certainly feel like it. But of what, I can hardly say.

The Forest of Doors

The Legend: There are places where the walls fall away and the doors stand on their own. Sometime these are narrow zigzags of stairs over the abyss with a single door at each landing. Others are vast misty expanses where dozens or hundreds of doors stand, waiting. No one knows where these landings come from, but it is said that they were constructed - built out by an ancient race of travelers as their own personal nexus of transit, adding new doors to the forest rather than traveling the stair.

The Truth: Pretty much nonsense. The image of a door standing on its own is a powerful one, and it shows up frequently in imagery and iconography associated with the Stair, and it's especially common for those going into a fugue to stop noticing the stairs and only notice the doors, but that is more of a reflection their state of mind than any kind of reality.

That said, there are places where the walls are not necessarily *visible*, or where their visual characteristics are a bit peculiar. In those places, it may appear that there's nothing but free standing doors, but it's simply an illusion.

As to the forest of doors, that one's particularly pernicious. I attribute it to wishful thinking. We have all toyed with the idea of building some manner of personal nexus at one point or another, just doors, un beholden to the drudgery of marching up and down the stairs and spared the inconvenience of other passersby. But to my knowledge, it remains a pipe dream.



Old Man Cavendish

Legend: There is a man as old as the stair itself. He calls himself Cavendish, and wherever he may be found, his garb is that of a traveller, and a drink is not far from his hand. He has survived every great tragedy the Stair has seen, and death comes in his wake. Should you ever find his cup empty, offer to fill it, and he may share with you a secret. But be wary, for it may not be a secret you want to hear.

The Truth: He's real, and leave him the hell alone. He has suffered enough.

The Cupboards

The Legend: At certain spots along the stair, you will find cupboard doors in the wall. Should you open them, they will open up into a dollhouse-like set of shelves, connected by stairs, and lined with doors. The doors may be opened, but reveal only wall behind them, and there is rarely ever anything to be found in these cupboards, save the odd knickknack - a bent nail, a bit of string, a dirty coin. There seems to be nothing more to them, but those who open these cupboards all report the sense that there was activity happening until the moment they opened the door to look. But, of course, that's just their mind playing tricks on them, isn't it.

The Truth: Oh, yeah, I've seen those. They freak me out a little. It's like there's a whole parallel Grand Stair for mice we never see, or faeries or something. I have no clue what's going on there.

Broken Stairways

Legend: In times of great disruption, the stair itself shifts, sometimes ejecting entire lengths from its length. These broken stairways are not destroyed, but instead spin off through the cosmos, operating in a manner similar to the Stair, simply on a smaller scale. Sometimes an explorer manages to find one of these on the far side of a strange door, and such a discovery is incredibly valuable. A warden might carve out a private domain in one of these, or discover powers so potent that the Stair itself could not bear them.

The Truth: This one's tricky. I have no evidence to support the existence of broken stairways, but it is not an unreasonable hypothesis. With some qualifiers.

First, every documented case of a broken stairway I have had the opportunity to investigate has merely been a case of a door that opened into a particularly inhospitable or confusing expanse of the Stair - the way up and down were not obvious, but they could be found by a properly trained eye. Tellingly, those who are inclined to find a "broken stair" are equally disinclined to look too hard for evidence to the contrary.

Second, if we accept the position that the Stair is ejecting these expanses, it seems vanishingly unlikely it would do so halfway. The idea that a world might be connected to the Stair and to a broken stair seems highly unlikely. Of course, as I

frequently note, unlikely is not the same as impossible, so I cannot completely rule it out. But I'm not holding my breath on this one.

Third, it is entirely reasonable to suggest that when the Stair appears to eject these stretches that it merely shuffled around the Stair. Disruption events are incredibly rare (at least within our experience) and poorly understood. It is equally reasonable to suggest that anything ejected from the Stair will not have the integrity to survive in whatever space exists between Worlds. It is possible that this is how anomalous-seeming areas like the Labyrinth come into being, though that seems like a very incomplete explanation of a very complicated phenomena.

Last, also bear in mind that this sort of disruption has virtually no impact on the worlds affected. They continue orbiting their sun or watching their flaming chariot or whatever they do, or at least we presume so.

But with all those qualifiers in place...it's possible. And I admit, the prospect is intriguing, because if it were to happen, there is no predicting the form it would take. Certainly the broken stairway might resemble the Stair as we know it, but it could take an entirely different form. A world tree. A great river. An infinite misty expanse filled with mirrors. The rules of the stairs as we know them may be entirely thrown out the window. Obviously, that would be incredibly interesting to study - the prospect of an equivalent of the stair operating according to different rules would be a fantastic opportunity to understand what makes the Stair work.

And, notably, none of this accounts for the reason that the section of Stair was ejected. Accepting that we probably can't fully

understand what triggers this kind of event, consider the implications of what *sort* of thing would get ejected. Things that threaten the stair itself perhaps? That's a daunting prospect.

I admit, it is difficult for me not to think of it in biological terms, with the stair as a living entity ejecting "unhealthy" tissue. But that, of course, suggests another image - reproduction. Perhaps these broken stairways have the potential to grow into Stair-analogs of their own.

It seems like a flight of fancy if you think about it too much - what is food in this analogy? What else exists in this ecosystem? And yet...there certainly is something to the idea of the Stair operating in an organic fashion. Not to say it's a

living thing in any sense, but rather that it has those characteristics of responsiveness and adaptability which are very life-like. Certainly, it is easier for me to conceive that the stair was "grown" rather than built, but perhaps that is my failing.

In any case, this is largely an exercise in the hypothetical. Even if broken staircases exist, it is unlikely that we will ever intersect with them in any meaningful way. Even the powers we are familiar with would likely fail to cross the threshold to "our" Stair in any meaningful way - the Stair has such a gravity (for lack of a better word) that even universal forces like the Umbra or Eidolon might be expressed relative there specific stairway.

But it is certainly fascinating to think upon.

