

*Report on the Condition of Darius of Sunspire
By Tertius of The Spire of Twisting Shadow*

Background:

A long term guest of the Spire, Darius came to stay with us after returning from an ill-fated journey into the great forest of Peytaht. As with many residents of Sunspire, Darius had made some study of the forest-dwelling entities known as Vallorn. Whilst there is no evidence that a Vallorn dwells within Peytaht, it is apparent that something powerful and inhuman is present. Rumours persist regarding Vallorn (an understandable and unfortunate misunderstanding that occurs with all woodland-based mysteries), and Darius had set out to discover more: to prove or disprove.

We know that he engaged the services of the Company of the White Stag, a Varushkan warden fellowship known for their bravery and daring when confronting the dark creatures often found in the forests of Varushka. That Peytaht is occupied by such a Sovereign is another persistent theory, and again, one with precious little evidence to support it. Of course, if the nature of the place can be determined and made safe, there is much to be gained since the forest is so tremendously rich with weirwood.

The expedition was well equipped: Darius himself was a skilled Winter ritualist with knowledge of many protective magics, and a potent battle mage besides. He was accompanied by many skilled wardens, who were both armed to the teeth and possessed of much handed-down lore about the strange things that dwell in the Empire's dark corners, and how they can be destroyed or placated.

Yet no more than a week after they started into the forest, Darius was found stumbling alone and bloody through the Barrens, his clothes reduced to tatters, babbling incoherently. The wardens from the Company of the White Stag were never seen again, though the blood covering Darius was not his own. We did initially attempt to draw him on what exactly happened within the forest, and he responded by either drawing complex diagrams of the net of the heavens, or by launching himself at those nearby and attempting to twist off their heads: I suspect he is re-enacting the deaths of his companions; trying in good faith to explain the incident to us but unable to communicate verbally.

Notes:

The guest alternates between two main types of behaviour. The first is a catatonic state that he often remains in for days at a time. The second a mania, which may provide clues as to his condition. He does not sleep at all in the conventional sense and rarely closes his eyes.

Catatonia:

During these phases he can be fed and bathed, though he goes through the motions mechanically, and does nothing for himself excepting to chew and swallow. External stimuli seem to hold no interest for him and it is unclear whether he can truly see or hear anything we show him. However, I have observed that when the guest is in this state his eyes move rapidly and constantly in the manner of a dreamer. I theorise that in actual fact he perceives plenty during this time, but what he perceives, is either invisible to the rest of us, or existent only within his own mind.

Mania:

At other times, the guest speaks almost constantly, whether or not there is anyone else present. If given quill and ink, pencil and paper, paints or the like, he will write or draw at the same time. It is in fact crucial to the guest's care that he be supplied with writing or artistic materials, as in their absence he will attempt to communicate through other media, often writing in his own blood or scratching marks with his fingernails. It is not clear whether what he expresses on paper or the walls and furniture of his sanctum are connected in any way to his stream of verbal communication, but from observation I would say generally not: I believe the guest regularly communicates two or even three separate concepts simultaneously.

The guest needs quality care after these episodes, as he does not eat, drink or rest for this time, and therefore he becomes dangerously dehydrated, his throat raw and inflamed, and his hands cramped and blistered.

Of course, we now have literally boxes full of Darius' writings, and other work, and occasionally transcripts of his stream-of-consciousness monologues. One might think that there is some great secret to be divined by examining them, but I have spent much time fruitlessly doing so. Imagine a great library in the richest and most ancient of spires. Then imagine every page of every book and scroll shredded into pieces, and all the pieces stuffed randomly back onto the shelves. This is what Darius's mind has become.

For example the output of one particular day was:

- *A series of plans for strange geometric buildings of unknown purpose*
- *A detailed map of Hahnmark, showing (I think), the passage of air currents through the mountains*
- *Anatomical diagrams of several types of fox, not all of which I can identify*
- *The following series of numbers, which he spoke aloud continuously throughout the episode. 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 25, 42, 67, 131, 220, 351, 571, 1142, 1733, 3075, 5030, 10125, 15155, 25302, 42457 (it continued). As a keen amateur mathematician I pored over this for some time, eventually realising it is the "flower petal sequence", but in an octal numbering system.*

Conclusions (causes):

Having spent a great deal of time dealing with this most fascinating of guests, I am forced to the frightening conclusion that expedition was a partial success. I believe that Darius did discover something within the forest, and that it is neither Vallorn, nor sovereign. Whatever it is, it is a superior intellect, and the knowledge it provided was simply too much for Darius's mind to contain.

I am not clear whether during the catatonic periods, he is attempting to organise the information correctly, or simply to stop thinking for a time, but he seems incapable of achieving either.

Conclusions (treatment):

Our guest's mental state is a very real danger to his own person, as he compulsively focuses on certain activities without a care for his basic needs.

Mentally his condition neither worsens nor improves.

The guest seems possessed of a vast wealth of knowledge. It is of unknown origin, and lacking in context.

Due to his propensity to seize any available media to express himself, I strongly recommend he NEVER be allowed crystal mana or mage's paraphernalia of any kind.

When ushabti have been used as part of his care regimen, there have been unexplained incidents of them acting according to unheard instructions, often in unison. I recommend NO further investigation of this phenomenon.

Many would probably argue that Darius has a truly unfettered mind, a thing of beauty that should be allowed to flourish. My recommendation is that for his own safety and that of the Empire, permission from the conclave is sought to use a variant of cast Off the Chain of Memory to remove all of Darius's memories.