



On the Nature of Davokar

WHAT FOLLOWS is one of the most condensed and at the same time enlightening descriptions there is of the forest of Davokar. The text is a report from a performance at the wine cellar Tuvinel in Yndaros. The speaker was an anonymous, allegedly successful, treasure-hunter, and the transcriber was none other than Iasogoi Brigo – then one of Ordo Magica's most ambitious novices, nowadays famous himself for having explored the Catacombs of Akkona.

The anonymity of the speaker may be understood as an effect of the almost sectarian atmosphere that can be found among experienced treasure-hunters:

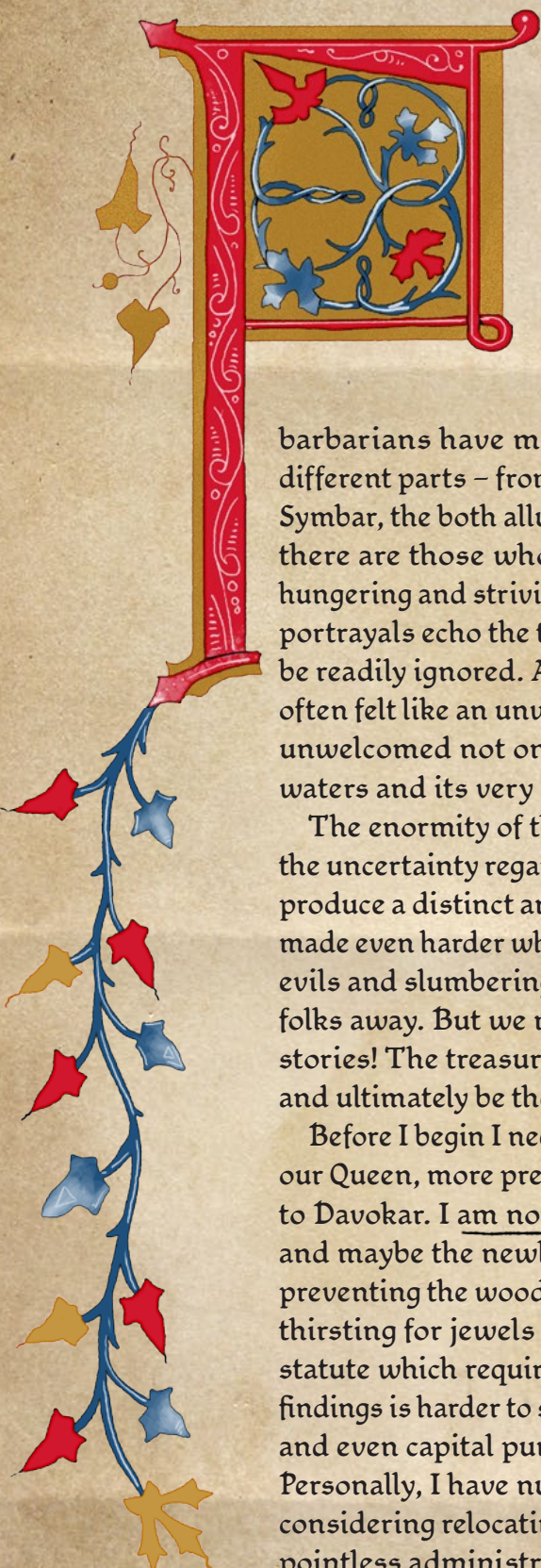
they gladly compete with each other but are careful not to invite newcomers to the race for the fortunes of the forest. To convey one's knowledge to the lackeys of the Queen and the noble houses, like this speaker does, is pretty much the worst one can do since the high born of Ambria already are unjustly favored by having access to inexhaustible resources.

Hence, we should salute the orator for having the courage to speak his mind; it is only through such generosity that newly hatched adventurers can be given a chance to survive their first, staggering steps along the treasure-hunter's path.

Symbaroum



JÄRNRINGEN



or the uninitiated, let's start by stating the obvious: Davokar is a forest like no other.

Firstly, it is enormous, so vast that it takes weeks or months to cross it, depending on the selected route and what happens on the way. Second, it is so varied that the barbarians have more than a hundred words for describing its different parts – from the border territory in the south, Odovakar, to Symbar, the both alluring and horrifying heart of the forest. Thirdly, there are those who persist in portraying Davokar as a being, a hungry and striving, even thinking, organism. And although such portrayals echo the tall tales of barbarians and witches they cannot be readily ignored. As sure as I am standing before you now, I have often felt like an unwelcomed intruder in the leafy halls of Davokar; unwelcomed not only by elves and beasts but also by vegetation, waters and its very soil.

The enormity of the forest, paired with its varied vegetation and the uncertainty regarding its basic character, makes it impossible to produce a distinct and holistic account of its nature. And the task is made even harder when barbarians and elves make up tales of ancient evils and slumbering sources of corruption, hoping to scare honest folks away. But we must not be deterred by uncertainty and ghost stories! The treasures of Davokar can feed families, pay for castles and ultimately be the sun that makes the realm of Korinthia bloom.

Before I begin I need to comment on the restrictions established by our Queen, more precisely on the laws regulating our people's access to Davokar. I am not man enough to question the wisdom in this, and maybe the newly established explorers license is essential for preventing the woods from overflowing with gold-sniffing paupers, thirsting for jewels and artifacts. But what good can come from a statute which require us explorers to register and pay taxes for our findings is harder to see; on the same note, the threat of imprisonment and even capital punishment seems unwarranted, to say the least. Personally, I have numerous friends, celebrated explorers, who are considering relocating their enterprises elsewhere in order to avoid pointless administration and unjust charges. Such a development will undoubtedly be the downfall of our Queen's realm!

The talk of nature as possessing a soul is surely a symptom of the barbarian people's lack of reliable methods for categorization, classification and ranking – an inadequacy also found among elves and goblins

The latter is possibly a reference to the solar of knowledge, and the archaic wisdom that awaits us in the depth of the forest

correct!

*and thereby avoiding outright elven war campaigns against our outposts in Davokar – an argument that the speaker either ignores or is unaware of

This final remark may be disregarded – the arguments as well as the conclusions stem in a way which only reveals the speaker's self-interest.

The Open

Davokar's outer regions, the home of the barbarian clans, may be entered without directly endangering life and limb – the vegetation is comparatively young and lets more sunlight slip through than the horrors of the forest can endure. But to enter the clan territories without weapons is not advisable. Likewise, I would counsel prospective explorers to always travel in groups, to have their licenses in order, to make careful travelling plans and to stick to those plans no matter what. Good relations within the group, meticulous preparations and the ability to resist temptations are vital for securing a successful return!

However, in the outer regions it is still possible to find help and shelter if something goes awry. The watchers patrolling the road between Otra Senja and Otra Dorno sometimes make tours into the woods, often together with the Queen's Rangers when they have heard rumors about potential threats along the southern border. And there are also a growing number of permanent outposts in the southern part of the forest, where the faithful servants of our Queen engage in woodcutting, excavations and scholarly studies of Davokar's flora and fauna.

It gets worse if you travel further north, to the western and eastern outskirts. The barbarians dwelling there are not as peaceable as the clan Odaiova in Odovakar. He who seeks shelter must first convince the chieftain and his witch that he is a) no threat, b) healthy and unsullied, and c) averse to any kind of activity that threatens to disturb Davokar. If you are able to convince the chieftain, you can trade in wares and services for food and shelter; if you fail to convince them, you will at best be driven away, at worst become a pincushion for very large needles.

The latter is presumably an attempt at humor.
"Large needles" may allude to arrows, spears
or the sharpened withies of a pitfall.

Nature

The open parts of Davokar are as beautiful as a forest can be – lush tree crowns over a bright green undergrowth full of fruit-bearing plants and lovely wildflowers, everything colored by the rays that filter down from above. In other places the pines form majestic halls, with trunks up to three hundred feet high, so thirsty and overarching that nothing but emerald green moss covers the ground.

The call for
"good relations"
may possibly
explain what
happened to the
expedition led
by Eulia Vearra
and Parax Spider-
bane last year.
Recommendation:
Not more than
one Master per
expedition

Is there a
need for a
generic
argumentation
guide?

A glorifying
exaggeration,
possibly inspired
by Taubio's
"Hymn to the
Leafy Deep"
or Verter's
"So Opulent was
Never the ocean"

Unverified,
yet another
exaggeration?

But the newly baked treasure-hunter must be on his guard. Fruits and berries can poison just as well as they can heal; a welcoming grove can prove to be a fen in disguise; a pretty rose bush can suddenly slither its branches around your legs and arms, hunting for nutritious flesh-juices. To pay for a skilled pathfinder is always worth every thaler it costs!

See previous,
Self-interest?

Regarding ruins and other treasure-grounds, the open parts of Davokar have a lot to offer. By tradition the barbarian clans leave the treasures alone and other forest dwellers have no reason to poke around in mankind's past – hence, the lucky explorer can still find untouched ruins or even whole ruined cities. Most locations along the southern border have already been mapped and plundered, by the Queen's explorers or by brave treasure-hunters, but if one ventures further north or deeper down into the soil the chances of discoveries are dramatically increased.

Further processing the barbarian people is needed. Renegade individuals must be identified and offered payment or shares in any findings. If met with refusals, the use of flogging should be considered, since information about virgin treasure-grounds is crucial for the advancement of Ambria.

Creatures

Logical lapse.
If the
second
statement is
correct, why
single out
the barbarians
from the
prey-animal
category?

The open parts of Davokar are primarily the home of barbarians and prey-animals; the predators of the deep regard all who dwell in the outskirts as quarries, whether they walk on two legs or four. Packs of jakaars and mare cats, famished abominations, hulking arch trolls – all of them hunt along the forest edge, mostly at night but many exceptions have been reported.

To the threats against travelers one should also add fairies and elflings. The former apparently love to lure humans into the arms of all sorts of monstrosities, out onto quagmires or into fiendish traps of varying kinds. The elflings act with greater passion, especially if they are led by an elf. Humans who find themselves in the wrong place, who are in violation of the treaties, seldom get more than one warning; then the pointy-ears attack – directly if they are superior in numbers and strength, with ranged weapons while tactically retreating if the balance of force is the other way around.

Spring and
Summer Elves,
presumably.

Again: You need to be armed, travel in groups and be able to withstand temptations if you are to survive in Davokar!

Inconclusive:
Good relations and meticulous preparations
should be added.

The Wild

The speaker seems to suggest that our excavations in the outskirts will prove fruitless, that richer sources of knowledge may be found further in. The plausibility of this statement should be examined.

Further into the woods there are regions of a more perilous kind; areas so dangerous that only experienced and well-equipped companies should enter them. Truly ambitious treasure-hunters have no alternative but to do so, since most of the wild parts border on or surround interesting hunting-grounds; the same goes for explorers seeking knowledge about Davokar's past.

In any case, you never venture into the wild unless you are willing to sacrifice your life in exchange for a chance to find riches, archaic knowledge or fame. And one does so without any hope of rescue! Our Queen and her subjects still only have one outpost in the wild parts of Davokar, namely at the temple ruin that is being explored and renovated by the sun knights, three days walk east of Karvosti. Aside from that, one has to be incredibly lucky to meet anything but hostiles and gluttonous monsters in the wild.

The speaker is obviously unaware of the Black Pitch Mine and the excavation of Serandi's Pyramid; a clear sign that the cover-up has been successful.

Nature

In general, the wild is dominated by a primeval kind of forest – dark green, bushy, thorny and unwelcoming. Lethal berries and fruits disguise themselves as their edible cousins from the outskirts; a small stream may very well hide a precipitous abyss under its rippled surface; giant sinkholes lurk under thin layers of moss-covered creepers. And then there is the Kelder..

However, sometimes the wild can be confusingly similar to the open, and wild areas may actually exist in what appears to be open forest – you can happen upon a grove of Kelders or a field of hidden sinkholes on what you thought were safe grounds.

Regarding the ruins of the wild, there are two important notes to make. First, they are hard to find since they are often totally overgrown or so crumbled that only the foundation and any basement levels are intact. Second, you can be sure that they are inhabited or at least a part of someone's turf. And that "someone" will undoubtedly be opposed to the intrusion.

Compare with the temple's report regarding the arch-trail Rohaxo and our own confrontations with the abomination at the Clear Water excavation.

Kelder:
A cedar tree with twin-needles that emits a soporific dust, then uses its mycelia-like roots to pierce the skin of sleeping victims to drain them of nutrients.

The classification into Open, Wild and Dark is here revealed to be flawed. The information offered should be reinterpreted based on the Duality Principle of Malliano's, or on Lukeresia's Four Field Matrix over Davokar's Domains.

Of course, any indisputable limits between these types of regions do not exist.

Creatures

The creatures nesting in the deep of Davokar form a positively vile array of beasts. Here are roaming abominations driven by insatiable hunger; groups of rage trolls and exiled giants; colonies of etterherds and skullbiters; packs of jakaars and mare cats; and shapeshifting, unclassified beings of other-worldly origins.

Additionally, both the barbarians and my treasure-hunting colleagues tell of numerous individual beings that dwell in the deep. I have been spared from meeting these creatures – called by names like Lord Bog, the Beck Bully, the Hawthorn Hag or Slaughterman – so I cannot claim to know which of these exist and, if so, what they actually are and whether or not they are hostile.

The latter is presumably a reference to what the Order calls demoniacal entities

A record of such beings/creatures has been compiled by Mallianos. He concludes that most of them are mere fragments of imagination and that the remaining names allude to severely aged and therefore grotesquely distorted elves and/or trolls, often with several names referring to one and the same being.

The Dark

He who travels through Davokar should never forget where the green and the gaudy has its roots. Even the richest harvest feeds on decay and you have never seen a harvest so rich, nor a soil so black as the one you find in the shadowy halls of Davokar. Among the regions of the forest there are some that are rumored to be especially hazardous. Very few have visited Dark Davokar and returned to talk about it, and many of the survivors have severe wounds in both body and soul, making their tales unreliable. At any rate, from what I gather the dark regions have little in common, besides that they should be avoided like the plague. Literally!

Many have described Dark Davokar as infested with contagions and parasites; diseases which affect the flesh and mind of the exposed in different ways but always with horrible consequences – the victims grow insane, warped, lame, rabid or undead; or all of those combined. Other stories tell of distortions or deep tears in the fabric of nature, of monsters that defy all reason and of ancient curses so vibrant that they will boil the flesh from the bones of everyone that comes near.

Aside from the symptoms I have witnessed on the returning few, I don't know how much truth lies in the stories. But one thing is certain: as long as there are untouched ruins elsewhere it would be foolish to enter the dark. For my part, I would rather die than go on the hunt for mystical sites like Dakovak, Saroklaw or the place which have been called "the Mother of Darkness", Symbar.

A report from Chapter Master Cornelio's visit to the dungeons below the Sun Temple in Thistle Hold can be found in the archive and could be of interest for comparison

Nature

Seeing that no one has entered Dark Davokar and returned with speech and senses intact, I cannot offer more than rumors regarding its nature. According to my assessment there are about a dozen areas that deserve attention in this context, areas that will force all who enter them to face almost inhuman challenges. There are tales of seas of thorns, petrified forests, pools of syrupy black water and rivers of magma.

Even wilder legends tell of icy cold in the middle of summer, luminescent vegetation, regions which share its ground with demonic dimensions and underground lakes filled with acid that emit poisonous fumes which rise to the surface. If one were to take all the stories seriously it is as if the depth of Davokar is made up of the absolute contrast to everything we know as normal, where all true forms of life are bound to break apart.

If it weren't for the difficulties of finding the way, there might still be good reasons to brave the dangers and visit the ruins of the dark, not least Symbar itself, which the barbarian witches claim to have been the high seat of the civilization that bloomed here a millennia ago. As previously mentioned, both barbarians and elves stay clear of the remains so if the witches are right, places like Symbar and Saroklaw are probably full of riches. But there is still a lack of trustworthy directions to Davokar's darkest parts. To blindly fumble for gems in a sack full of vipers, toxic thorns and famished leeches, well that is an enterprise which only a lunatic can find alluring.

Words of a fortune hunter who already has found his fortune;
less applicable to well-equipped expeditions arranged by our order.
However, the assessment of the speaker coincides with the one
presented by Grand Master Seldonia after the congregation
of year 14 - finding and exploring Symbar is of highest priority!

Creatures

The tales of the creatures dwelling in Dark Davokar are many fewer than the portrayals of its nature, maybe because he who encounters anything living in there quickly ceases to live. Most have probably been told by my former colleague and friend, Onedar Routefinder, who nowadays is imprisoned under the monastery of the Twilight Friars, swinging from hysteric outbursts to trancelike apathy.

With my own ears I have heard Routefinder whimper about blood-thirsty, bone-pale elf warriors; about Symbaroum's predatory Wraith Guard; about possessed toad-monsters, tall as two men; and about

The mentioning
of magma rivers
linked to the Dark
is of interest;
launching more
expeditions with
the Earth Wound
as a point of
departure may
pay off.

An excerpt
from our Grand
Master's interrogations
with Onedar is
to be found in
Section Y, shelf 16,
entitled "The skin
sack in the Alley."

Counting Ondar
Routefinder we
now have three
statements
about the
anemic "night
elves, two about
dragons or drachans,
and two describing
abnormally large
amphibians.

something that he alternately called dragons, serpents and drackans. The only part of his ravings that seems reasonably reliable, not least since it has been repeated by others, is his description of the so called Predatory Clan and its camp site in Saroklaw – all else must be taken with a fistful of salt.

Closing Remark

Is Davokar a being, a hungry and thirsting creature with moss for skin, streams and rivers for circulatory system and with a pulsating, commanding Symbar hidden somewhere below the greenery? After more than five years as an explorer under its leafy roof I am inclined to answer in the negative: Davokar is not one creature but many, a horde of the woods whose soldiers only have one thing in common – they are opposed to every attempt to harvest, cultivate or intrude on their realm.

Mobilization and a unified sense of purpose are needed if Queen Korinthia's people, us newcomers to this hostile but abundantly rich land, shall achieve the life we deserve. Davokar can become ours – we can expel the elven watchers, eradicate the abominations, cure the infections and ultimately safeguard our future with the help of Symbaroum's ancient heirlooms.

I want to conclude my speech by raising a glass to Korinthia Nightbane – our thunderbolt in the dark, our mistress and the slayer of all enemies!

The speaker seems unaware of the conflicts that need to be overcome to make sure that any heirlooms/artifacts will be used for the common good, not only for the good of a select few – a symptom of naivety that needs to be taken into account when analyzing everything he says.



Laggoj Blego