

Observations on Tari Myco-Culture and the Suonba Withering

Introduction to Tari Fungiculture: The Tari, colloquially known as "ratmen" by many surface dwellers of Athas, exhibit a sophisticated and deeply integrated fungal culture, particularly vital for their communities dwelling in the subterranean warrens beneath cities like Balic. Their society demonstrates a remarkable reliance on various fungi for sustenance, tools, and illumination. Specialized roles within Tari packs, such as the **Ghir'leer** (fungus harvesters) and the **Ghir'vhan** (fungus shapers), underscore the importance of this myco-centric lifestyle.

Key Fungal Species Utilized by the Tari:

- **Blandvert:** The primary food staple, this large, flat fungus is cultivated extensively. True to its name, it is largely tasteless but provides essential nutrition. It is considered a sacred gift from the Earth by the Tari.
- **Kee'l:** A smaller, sweet-tasting fungus that develops a yellow hue upon exposure to the Athasian sun. Cultivated by skilled Ghir'leer, it serves as a dessert and a trade commodity, occasionally finding favor among surface nobles.
- **Sarshi:** Primarily used by wilderness Tari, this cactus-like fungus is adapted to arid conditions. Its wind-borne spores await moisture, allowing rapid growth. The fungus then forms a hardy, evaporation-resistant shell, making it a nutritious and hydrating resource. Its prevalence is noted in the Southern Tablelands.
- **Flavoring & Utility Fungi:**
 - *Silorn:* Imparts a peppery taste.
 - *Velot:* Offers a bitter flavor profile.
 - *Bheri:* A fruity-tasting fungus.
 - *Belist:* Fermented into a potent beverage, generally unpalatable to humanoids but highly valued by other species, notably Athasian Giants.
 - *Viershak:* A normally bowl-shaped brown fungus. Ghir'vhan can cultivate it and, by sealing it with fungal sap (*Vierpak*) and careful drying, transform it into durable wooden-like bowls or larger "blown-up" storage vessels. Exceptionally skilled Ghir'vhan can craft *Viershak* into urns suitable for trade.
- **Suonba (The Living Light):** An iridescent fungus of critical societal importance. Both Ghir'vhan and Ghir'leer cultivate Suonba to illuminate the Tari warrens, warding off the oppressive darkness and the unknown terrors it may conceal. The Tari exhibit a deep-seated fear of true, unmitigated darkness.

The Suonba Withering: A Fungal Affliction: Recent observations and discussions with Tari elders (such as Vek the Ghir'vhan and Chieftain Skreek of the Balic warrens) have brought to light a grave affliction affecting their vital Suonba cultures, particularly since their displacement from former territories like Ashfall Vale.

- **Symptomatology:**
 - A noticeable dulling of the Suonba's natural iridescence and a significant reduction in light output.
 - The fungal structure becomes unusually brittle, eventually leading to its collapse into inert, lifeless dust.
 - Affected beds become susceptible to colonization by common, often detrimental, subterranean molds.
 - Psionically-attuned Tari report a disturbing "sensory void" or "dissonance" emanating from the Suonba cultures even before physical symptoms become apparent. This suggests a disruption in the psionic link or manipulation inherent in its cultivation.
- **Tari Etiology and Treatment:**
 - The Tari have cultivated and psionically manipulated their Suonba strains for countless generations, refining them for optimal luminosity and perhaps other psionic benefits conducive to their society.
 - Current Tari understanding, primarily among the Ghir'vhan, is that the "Withering" is not due to an external pathogen. Instead, they believe it to be a **reversionary infection**, where the highly cultivated Suonba is being "overwritten" or "reclaimed" by an **archaic, ancestral strain of itself**. This primal version is described as less luminous, less responsive to Tari psionic influence, and aggressive in its propagation.
 - Conventional treatments (e.g., nutrient adjustments, application of other fungal agents to combat infection) have proven entirely ineffective against this reversion.
 - The current, drastic treatment involves the complete **destruction by desiccation** (rapid, intense drying) of any Suonba bed showing signs of the Withering, in an attempt to halt the spread of the archaic strain.

Potential Connection to Shrumen Ailments: The characteristics of the Suonba Withering—specifically the concept of a highly specialized, psionically-influenced fungal organism reverting to a more primitive, archaic state, and the associated loss of specialized function and vitality—present a noteworthy parallel to the mysterious "Fading Sickness" observed in some Shrumen communities.

- **Shrumen as Modified Fungi:** Shrumen physiology and consciousness are deeply intertwined with their unique, sentient fungal nature, which has undergone significant modification and psionic nurturing throughout their history.
- **Shared Symptoms:** The "Fading Sickness" in Shrumen also manifests as a loss of vitality, physical degradation, and a reported "quieting" or diminishment of their connection to the collective mycelial consciousness – analogous to the psionic dissonance reported by the Tari with their afflicted Suonba.
- **Hypothesis:** The afflictions affecting both the Tari's Suonba and the Shrumen could stem from a similar underlying mechanism: a form of **atavistic regression** where a more primal, less specialized ancestral fungal form reasserts dominance over a more evolved, psionically-influenced descendant. If the psionic "imprint" or cultivation that maintains the specialized state is weakened or disrupted, this archaic form may take hold.

This shared phenomenon suggests that the Tari's struggle to understand and combat the Suonba Withering may offer invaluable insights into the nature of, and potential remedies for, the ailment affecting the Shrumen people. Further investigation into the psionic components of Suonba cultivation and the specific triggers for this "archaic reversion" is warranted.