

Miranda Cornelius' Journal...

DM: Patrick Plouffe aka Jonathan Winters

Players: Steve Flam aka Tarlyn (playing Miranda, and writer of this journal)
Patrice Lazure (playing Niles)
Joël Paquin (of the FoS) (playing Philippe Mathurine)

This is Miranda's personal journal of her adventures. You'll eventually see that Miranda has a few things in her background she isn't proud of, as well as a few scars... So be warned that Miranda's point of view is often tainting her lenses when she writes this journal!

DM comments are in blue!

Ravenloft Campaign Background

Here are some historical facts the PCs know.

- 740: - *Grand Conjunction: A major change in the geography of the Core lands and its Islands.*
- *Start of Tepestani Inquisition.*
- 741: - *Hazlan school of wizardry built.*
- 742: - *Bloody Jack's 13th killing spree.*
- 744: - *Realm of Timor is found underneath Paridon.*
- 747: - *Malocchio Aderre takes control of Invidia.*

Also, There is no "Claimed by Darkon" Memory loss craziness in my game until I figure out something I personally like. So there! ☺

Short background on the PCs

Miranda Cornelius (Monk)

Born in Paridon in 728. I didn't value much my parents' morals and at a young age joined a street gang. Sooner or later it caught up with me and I was caught by the police. To my parents chagrin, I was sent to the Divinity of Mankind Temple in Paridon. After a few years of studying there, the Temple had had enough of me and sent me to Darkon to study languages.

I like to keep mostly to myself. I don't trust anyone, especially those with money. The only thing that I hold any interest for is languages. I seem to have a knack for them. I guess Sister Agatha knows me better than I do.

At the University in Darkon I met these two gentlemen, Niles and Philippe. Together we've traveled back to Paridon for some personal business of mine. Though Philippe is a stinking Noble I sort of trust him.

Niles Nicholson (Wizard)

I was born in a place that no longer exists, in a time that no longer exists either. It was somewhere in Zherisia's countryside, not too far from Paridon. I had a relatively normal childhood, even though the blackness of my hair was something quite unusual in my realm. My parents used to work the land, coming to Paridon twice a week to sell the products of their little farm. Despite their efforts to transmit their work ethic to me, I grew up to be quite a procrastinator quite honestly. I always felt like time was on my side, like I had the whole eternity to accomplish my goals. Time in itself has always been a fascinating concept to me. When I was young, I would lackness of .

Our D&D House Rules

Character Classes:

For a group with few players (two or three) and lacking in diversity (ex: no rogue or cleric), a character may "multi-class" at every 5th level by adding another class like a template to her character.

So a 4th level sorcerer character could become a 5th level sorcerer / 1st level rogue. Her main class is sorcerer and she uses the sorcerer's BAB and saves, but for this level, she has access to the rogue's skills too as class-skills for that level.

She also gains the rogue's class features for that level (Sneak Attack + 1D6, Trapfinding).

Sorcerers:

For a group without any cleric, a sorcerer can add the domain spells of a god's domains to his known spell list, in addition to the arcane spell levels available to a sorcerer of this level. There are no other changes on number of spell per day cast, DC of spell, etc.

Example: with the "air" domain chosen (PHB p 185), he would add *Obscuring Mists* and *Wind Wall* to his spell list for a Sorcerer fourth level (he can have arcane spell level one and two).

Skills:

- Move Silently & Hide skills are replaced by Sneak (*Arcana Evolved*).
- For a group with few players (two or three), cross-class skills are maxed at half the class skills maximum, but may be bought at the cost of a class skill.

Session one – Shut-In from Dungeon 128

(played September 5th, 2007)

October 750 Martira Bay, Darkon

During class today, Ms Limiter received a telegram. She did read it then continued on with the class. After class was over, she beckoned me to her desk. Speaking to me as she handed me the letter, she said “You can take a leave of absence from your classes until you deem fit to return, Miranda.”

I frowned at her. “Just read the telegram” she said.

From Sgt Detective Lilly to Miranda Cornelius, Martira Bay University.

Late on the evening of the 20th of October, your parents were savagely attacked on their way home from their shop. The perpetrator escaped but luckily for your parents we came upon them in time. They are in the hospital in Riverside. You can get more information on this matter when you come back to Paridon.

Sincerely yours,

John Lilly, Detective

I read it twice, folded and placed it into a pocket. Looking at Ms Limiter I nodded and left. I went looking for the only 2 people I really got along with in this place, Niles and Philippe. Niles is from Paridon like me, but Philippe is from Souragne. Souragne is an island off of the core. He seems to not like Nobles just like me as is apparent by his attitude towards the nobles of Souragne when he speaks of them. However, his clothes and etiquette show extremely good education and well manners, go figure...

Me? I have not set foot back in Paridon in 5 years...

Ten years ago...

June 15th 740 Riverside, Paridon

I looked around. Spying Arthur and Penelope across the street I nodded once, then mingled with the flow of humanity you call the crowd at the market here in Paridon. I spotted an easy mark and let the crowd move me to him. He was an elderly man dressed elegantly with a nice pouch at his hip. Now that’s the challenge, get it without getting caught. I had almost caught a few times, but since the police knew my parents they let it be but last time I was warned sternly if I did get caught again, there would be dire consequences. I got pushed up against the man and with seeming ease snatched the purse and started walking away into the deep crowd, thinking myself clever. A hand gripped my shoulder and a voice says” We’ll have none of that little lady. Hand that back! I try to drop it and run but another hand grabs my hand and prevents me from doing so. I look back in fear and see it is indeed the gentleman I snatched the purse from and he grabs me

quite easily by the scruff of me neck and lifts me off the ground. “We are headed for the Constabulary and I am pressing charges.”

I look around and not surprisingly Arthur and Penelope are nowhere to be seen, the cowards. *What would mother and Father think of this? They think I only go to the Library to study. They already have enough to worry about with the Tailoring and Seamstress shop in the Merchants quarters. And from what Arthur has told me, they won't pay “Shorty” the money he demands all shops for his services of protection.*

We arrive shortly at the Constabulary and the man presses charges, then leaves. I am placed in a cell and left to wait. Many hours later my parents do arrive to get me, looking rather haggard and tired. Without looking or even speaking to me, we leave the station and head in a different direction than home.

“Where are we going?”

“We are taking you somewhere you may learn to be a proper lady and not this hooligan you have become”, my father spit at me.

“You think we do not know of your other indiscretions? Yet we do, Miranda. I had to pay a healthy sum to free you from the Constabulary on the condition you be taken somewhere and learn the proper way to behave in society. Your Mother and I do not deserve this and it is for the best”.

As he finishes talking we are in front of the Temple for the Divinity of Mankind. It dawns on me then. *I am to be sent to be a Monk, I am. Probably better off in here anyhow. Father is always working so hard so he can pretend to be a stinking noble or be accepted by them. Gold is after all just metal, nothing more. I only stole for the thrill and the challenge, never keeping the gold, which went to Shorty, I had been told by Penelope.*

Father knocks on the door and it opens a few moments later.

“This is her?”

“Yes”

“Be off then. She is in good hands here Mr and Mrs Cornelius”

With that, my parents turned and left, leaving me this rather young looking Sister.

“I am Sister Agatha Clairmont. You, my dear, address me as Sister Clairmont at all times. Come now, I will bring you to the lodges where you will be staying.

Miranda remained silent throughout the walk as Sister Clairmont described this or that or rules.

So this is the hand that I have been dealt. I bet all those rich haughty noble dimwits paid for this establishment.

All throughout her 5 years at the Temple, Miranda was one of the more troublesome students yet Sister Clairmont tolerated her because she found that Miranda had spirit and

although she did not study or supply a concrete effort, it came easily to her, especially the reading and writing parts. At the end of her 5 years, Sister Clairmont decided that Miranda would be better suited to perhaps studying abroad and experiencing another culture. To this end, she arranged to have Miranda study in Karg and Martira Bay at the Universities there. She only regretted not having done more for Miranda but alas the time had come for Miranda to move on. At 17 Miranda was old enough to move on as well...

October 750 Martira Bay, Darkon

A few days later we arrived in Riverside and headed straight for the Hospital. The doctor told me, well Niles, Philippe and myself, that my parents were attacked by this halfling named Peck. He is supposed to be the Swan Street Slicer. Sounds an awful lot like Bloody Jack if you ask me. Anyways after some prompting from Philippe, as my social skills with authority figures or anything Noble are severely lacking, we learn that this Peck has been around for a few months and has been killing Nobles. This killer has been caught by the police but unfortunately has escaped ... He will strike again, we are sure of it.

Well after he is done talking I arrange for my parents to be taken back home and have someone look after them there. That done, we head for the Divinity of Mankind Temple as suggested by the doctor. There we speak with my old "pal" Sister Agatha Clairmont. We learn pretty much the same from her and she suggests we go and help protect Lady Auraluna Dromdal at her home as the police are shorthanded at the moment and the Dromdals still have ties with a lot of institutions in the city. You see, the Dromdals' was the only place he got caught but got away unfortunately. And my parents were his next victims yet they are alive and the rest of his victims are dead.

Thanking the Sister we head for the homes of a few of my parents' neighbours and ask them about the Dromdals. We get the same thing we got from the police that were at the Temple as well as from the doctor at the hospital.

Some information the PCs gathered through Knowledge (local) and Gather Info checks:

- *Most of the victims were part of the upper echelons of society*
 - o *Lady Alexandra Billick, age 85*
 - o *Lord Daniel Thomas, age 48*
 - o *Lord Henry Amber, age 57*

- *Excerpts from the Newsbill: "Swan Street Slicer caught! ... Well, he sure ain't no Bloody Jack! ... Deranged mute halfling named Peck ... from the Bowels..."*

- *About the Dromdals:*
 - o *An old family who made their fortune off the sale of exotic lumbers, furniture and other wooden goods.*
 - o *Auraluna, the matron of the Dromdal family, was once a highly desired beauty, although she receives few visitors these days. Her only child Ceseli recently lost her husband to the Swan Street Slicer.*
 - o *The Dromdals are in decline. Auraluna has become incredibly bitter in her old age and is confined to a wheelchair. Ceseli has returned to the family home on Swan Street since her husband's recent murder.*

So off we go to the Dromdals in the Shadwell district and get greeted at the door by Barnsworth, the old butler, a man who is slower than a turtle and not the sharpest tool in the shed if you get my meaning. So we discuss with Lady Moneybags then look around. She does accept us protecting her. This evening she has guests for dinner and thanks to Philippe's silver tongue, we yet again get to stay but not in the same room.

So the guests arrive, Jebediah Stewardsfield (Banker), Neena Guesenholt (Friend) and her nephew Ned (A real dunce). So the meal goes on and we discover why Auraluna wanted to have good ole Jeb over. As her daughter, Ceseli Tuner-Dromdal's husband was killed by Peck, she is now "on the market" so her mother aspires. Well, Jeb got pretty racy there at the table, and I heard it. I get up and go to the doorway and looking straight at Jeb and state "Hey give the body a chance to cool off there, Tiger. You have absolutely no class at all. I guess money isn't everything now is it?" Of course Auraluna looks at me with daggers in her eyes but Ceseli simply smiles and says nothing. I am guessing Auraluna wants Ceseli to marry this twit so she can have money and of course prestige. Bah.

The dog starts baying for no reason. I decide to investigate upstairs and at the first door there, hear a noise. Of course the door is locked. I come back down and none too gently demand a key from Auraluna. Philippe again interjects and we get the key. Niles stays downstairs as Philippe and I go up. The door gets unlocked but no one is inside. The shutters are moving and this is what I heard. The window is broken behind it with no evidence of any broken glass on the floor. In the meantime we do find a book which Philippe graciously takes. Not a very lawful thing to do as I have learnt to now respect the law but not necessarily good or evil if that makes sense. So I decide that I am going to climb up onto the roof, and Philippe will stay at the window.

I climb up onto the roof with a lantern and look around. I see a few windows and as I am looking inside one, a figure jumps through the glass window, almost making me fall backwards in surprise. He misses for some reason and I now see that it is in fact Peck! I scream out to Philippe. A melee ensues and in the end, we prevail. Philippe is amazed of the number of blows I took, as he said he or Niles would have been killed by Peck's fury.

On Peck we find three potions, a really nice razor (*masterwork*), and an arcane bracelet along with some pocket change.

After explaining the situation to Lady Dromdal about what happened and of course handing back her precious key, we leave with Peck's body for the Constabulary...

Session Two – Shut-In from Dungeon #128

Introduction to Within the Circle from Dungeon #130

(Played September 27th, 2007)

November 2nd, 750, Shadewell, Paridon 10 pm

We leave the Moneybags Manor and head for the Constabulary until we hear a scream coming from the manor. Of course with "Carpet" Peck on my shoulder (we rolled him in a carpet to carry him – more discreet and convenient), it is *so easy* to run but I do make it back inside the house after the two guys.

We come upon a bloodied and dead Barnsworth whose throat has a piece missing and the little mutt Sachi licking his blood. Ceseli is unconscious next to him but less injured. Philippe does the right thing and cures Ceseli but she remains unconscious still. We hear screams coming from elsewhere in the manor and the elevator activates itself. With no sign of Mrs. Moneybags herself, we head for the elevator. At the elevator we get attacked from the back by Moneybags' large dog Baron and that damn little mutt Sachi. We overcome both dogs as Niles throws alchemical fire at the big Baron and then I knock it out. I also put Sachi in the kitchen's pantry. As we were fighting, we heard Moneybags yell out to Baron "Protect me! They want to kill me!" and other similar insanities...

Niles goes upstairs while Philippe and I open the door of the elevator and the stink of wet animal fur assaults our noses. *Man, even stink would say that the wet fur stinks!* And then we hear some screams coming from below... Philippe and I climb down the elevator shaft after I drop a sunrod down for illumination. A very strange thing this house as there are supposedly no more basements in Paridon... Yet right here in Moneybags' manor we find one! Odd!

Opening the elevator doors, we step out into a man made basement. A dishevelled man and woman are present in the back of the room near a table with chairs. And a tea set!? A rather large wet furry beast has its back to us and faces the couple. Philippe and I take this opportunity to introduce ourselves to the beast and attack it sneakily!

A battle ensues where I almost pass out from *Uglies'* attacks but we finally prevail and win! I couldn't help but notice its really fiery eyes. Niles arrives at the end of the battle to lend us a hand. Thank god! As Philippe was hurt and the man and woman stabilised him.

(Niles tells us that when he went upstairs, he forced the elevator's doors opened, unsure whether someone was inside: He met up with Auraluna who blasted him with an arcane missile before he could do anything! She was holding a wand of some kind. He managed to calm her down somewhat, she was apparently scared out of her mind of Ceseli, thinking her poor unconscious daughter and Peck both wanted to kill her. Niles, still giving Moneybags the benefit of the doubt, gave her his cat familiar as protection and headed downstairs after hearing us scream for help.)

Looking around the basement, we see sculpted faces in the wall... What in the name of? The man and woman, Vivi Knots and Karl Manderholm, tell us that Moneybags held them captive in the basement and had tea with them. She used a wand to put the dead people in the stone wall and cover their faces with rock: So the sculpted faces are more victims! Weird. Just before we got here, Moneybags came down and released the weak couple from the wall where they were held in the hopes that the *fiery dog* would kill them probably.

Another important piece of information gained from Vivi and Karl is that the old lady really needs her wheelchair to move around. Well, Niles tells us that Moneybags is a Wizard of sorts and evil. *Well, well imagine that, the old bag is really evil and crazy to boot. Can't say I am surprised.* So we send Vivi and Karl to the constabulary to get the police and explain what has happened.

We finally gang up on ol' Moneybags (who tries to flee to the basement as we go back up to the second floor). Niles quickly jams the elevator so she is stuck on the first floor. We run back downstairs and catch up to her!

(That was some good quick thinking. Had Auraluna made it to the basement, she would have sealed up the evidence. And it would have been their word against hers, which is the word of a

noble. No evidence, no bodies, no victims. I can't see how the investigation could have gone on... Obviously, she would remember them for a long time. She probably will... ☺)

Philippe ends up surprising everyone as a silver-tongued charmer, playing to the old lady's vanity (and craziness if you ask me!). She gives us her wand, holding it like some ugly thing... Philippe convinces her to come to the police and tell her tale. She ends up spewing some story about Peck being after her, and working together with Ceseli against her. After coming around, Ceseli cannot help but cry at her mother's accusations...

In the meantime, we look around the house and find a room with child's clothing which would, strangely enough, fit Peck? *She is one demented old bag, let me tell you.* Fifty pounds of salted meat is found in another room in the house as well (for that strange ugly dog, which Dromdal tells us her husband brought back from Sri Raji ages ago because of her love for dogs...). I guess the old Barnsworth couldn't put two and two together. Well, we think that the old bag was reliving her youth with all her extra curricular activities these past few weeks and even months.

We all end up at the police station and get questioned and so does Moneybags. For over two hours. Peck is unconscious and we overhear some High MuckyMuck Monks mention "the Black Maw and (or "for") Peck" in the same sentence (not sure what they mean by that...). Whatsername gets her own cell and two guards. I bet she feels real special now.

So our business done, we head home and sleep!

November 3rd, 750, Riverside, Paridon

The next day, Niles and Philippe study their spells and we look for a place that sells scrolls or someone who actually has the spell *identify*. Referred by my friend Agatha Clairmont, someone at the temple might be able to help us, he asks us to come back the next day.

We go home again for supper where my parents have prepared a rather nice table for us (considering Paridon's situation and means). I guess they are proud of me after all... After dinner we have a visitor who is some baron's lackey – valet I guess. Baron Joachim Aulbesmil from the barony of Nartok in Darkon requests our presence at the Cock and Bull Inn A.S.A.P. So we make Jonah the lackey wait 30 minutes just because and then he accompanies us to the inn.

Inside we are led to a fancy shmancy room and wait for the baron. So we meet both the baron and a man from Thistle, in the barony of Nartok, Mr Borden. Basically we are to be hired to help Thistle with a Goblyn (yes with a Y) problem. The village has been plagued with sickness and Goblyn infestation apparently. So at the baron's request, Mr Borden wants us to go and help them with the Goblins. We agree and Borden then retires for the night, yet the Baron stays with us somewhat longer...

He then tells us the real reason why he wanted to see us. *What a surprise! He He.* Twenty years ago, baron Aulbesmil was supposed to go to some warehouse a couple of hours away from Thistle and burn it down but failed because unfortunately it rained and he only managed to burn down the entrance. He was supposed to get some books as well. A group called the Maison de L'Anneau (*House of the Circlet*) were his patrons back then. He says he does not know why they wanted this depot destroyed and I guess he chooses to lie or withholds information from us. He does give us an enchanted ring which opens all the doors in the warehouse. This ring was given to him by his patrons of all those years...

He wants us to go back to the scene of his crime and find out clues as to the nature of his patrons: Who are they, what do they want with him? He also wants us to bring back his ring quickly in case someone notices he doesn't have it anymore.

We learned he did replace his brother as baron after his brother died from a virus. Ever since he became baron he has had no contact or very little with the Maison de L'Anneau. Were they responsible for the Baron's rise to the barony? (*Oh btw we removed a magical ring off of Moneybags. I think the ring must have fell from somewhere to the palm of my hand, honest!!!*) Well, needless to say, we find the whole deal rather shady and shall go but that doesn't mean we will help the Pyro Baron... Or at the very least, will be very careful.

Session Three – Tying up some loose threads from Shut-In from Dungeon #128; Within the Circle from Dungeon #130

(Played October 10th, 2007)

November 4th, 750 Riverside, Paridon

Well after breakfast, we headed for the Monastery at the Temple. We met with Brother Harold whom sold us a scroll for an exorbitant fee, in my opinion. But this is Paridon, go figure. (*I really thought the PCs would scream at what I charged them for an Identify scroll: 375gp! Having just received a reward for saving Vivi Knots and Karl Manderholm, I guess they decided to splurge...*)

After exchanging pleasantries, we head back home and who do we see at Mother and Father's, taking tea? Ceseli Dromdal, that's who. Apparently her Father being in Sri Raji searching for a cure for his *sickness* might just be a ploy. Or true. If you go by what her Mother is like, then yeah it's a ploy and she is guilty as sin. She is very thankful of our help and tells us that she will be searching as well as investigating for her Father in Sri Raji. I think she'd have better luck finding a needle in a haystack if you ask me. She may possibly even go to Sri Raji herself and offers us a set of keys to her house. We are welcome there any time. Maybe my comment about letting her dead husband's body grow cold warmed her up to us? Get it?

Ok, so after that we went to see Sister Agatha Clairmont to tell her we would be leaving Paridon for a few weeks. Did I **SEE A SMILE FROM HER????** Nah I must have had something in my eye, yes that is it. And she seemed **HAPPY** to see me? Stranger things have happened I suppose. Giving her our regards, we left for the boat. It was time to go on our trip to Thistle, Darkon.

We arrived in the port a little early. The boat was named Dunkelstern (*Dark Star, from the German... Hum, I mean, Falkovnian ☺*) and her captain is Rashid Al-Badr. Sounds like an exotic vegetable to me. Anyways. Rashid is originally from the Amber Wastes? What the hell is that? Doesn't sound like a place you'd wanna visit. He seemed to expect trouble as he had 2 short swords, one at each hip. Maybe he expected the fishies to attack his ship? (*or pirates maybe?*)

Lo and behold, our pyro "Benefactor" has a nephew named Lysander. And Lysander Aulbesmil looks up to Lord Joaquim Pyro Aulbesmil for some strange reason (*Did I really depict him in such a bad light? Or are we just getting paranoid in our old age?*). Go figure. The sea voyage

will take seven days. During this time I will finish learning a new language, thanks in big part to Philippe. I will be fluent in the Souragnien language when we dock in Martira Bay in seven days. Niles will learn how to ... hum... cast the scroll of... um... identifying... er... magic things? Ok let's skip that mumbo jumbo.

On board we are seven passengers and a crew of thirty. Boating is not my cup of tea. I'd rather gouge my eyes out, but hey that's me. So during our voyage we learn from Rashid that perhaps there are boats that are looking for new **CONTINENTS?????** There are other continents? Ya learn something new every day I suppose.

Hey during our voyage, Philippe talks to Lysander and Pyroman about hunting. Pyro apparently hunts with a falcon, a bird called Vollblut (which Niles tells us again means *Pure-Blood in Falkovnian*)? Ok next time I hunt, I am sending my Quarterstaff ahead of me to hunt. We learn during our sea voyage that the village of Thistle has a population of around 200 people. The sickness seemed to be like a super-gastro. Sounds like fun if ya ask me.

We hear of a legend of the darkonian Titans, the *Hu-Charad*? Apparently they were 10 feet tall and used to battle Dragons? Not what you'd call the conventional hobby, eh? Ok so after most of the Dragons were exterminated from Darkon, the rest fled the Core. The Titans followed after them to another land and they were not heard from again. *(Yes, go fetch a Malhavoc Press / Monte Cook Arcana Evolved book for this one. I just LOVE blending stuff from different sources into my games. I find it opens up possibilities one might not have thought of... And for those pesky RL connoisseurs, they're just not sure what is going on exactly, which is probably fun for them and good for the DM. Is it just window dressing for flavor or is there something else going on? Cue: Sinister laugh...)*

During the evening, at supper, Rashid sings. Ok so he has an odd hobby. He left the Amber Wastes 20 years ago and now is a resident of the sea? Hey I want an address like that: "To Ms Miranda Cornelius, about to sink somewhere in the Nocturnal Sea, off the shores of Darkon." Sounds kind of cool if you ask me.

November 11, 750 Martira Bay, Darkon

Finally on the 7th day we arrive in Martira Bay's port. I almost kissed the ground! Hey did you know November is the month of the dead here? I wanna go to the cemetery and yell out "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!"

In case you didn't know, Martira Bay is a very busy city. We learn of some sadistic bastard or bastards who are committing ritualistic murders in Darkon. I wonder if King Azalin Rex is doing anything about that?

Here Baron Pyro leaves us to go back to Nartok, his servant wench Ghini following and his man-at-arms Jonah. I guess he likes a lapdog. Not my cup of tea. So we head for Thistle from Martira Bay. It'll take a few days to make it. So we accompany Mayor Borden to Thistle and upon arrival we requisition the "Manoir" as our headquarters. While traveling, we spot Griffons on the horizon, it is quite a sight... We also give the village some medical supplies provided us by baron Aulbesmil. We manage to get a couple of Minor Quintessence alchemical potions from what is left (*1D8+1 healing damage*).

November 15th, 750 Thistle, Darkon

According to Jern, Borden's squire, the Goblins wish to parley the next day at the crack of noon. Their leader's name is Belig. I don't know about you but I think Goblins need lessons in naming their people. Perhaps they think the same of us humans?

November 16th, 750 Thistle, Darkon

We decide to ambush the poor schmucks. Niles and Philippe will be there at 10 am and I will accompany Jern to the parley. I will use one of my newfound abilities and enlarge myself (*Since the character was already a redhead, I allowed Miranda to take the Redhead feat. I don't see anything wrong with somehow "developing" abilities through a character's life. As a side note, she gained Cure Light Wounds and Enlarge Person. This way the feat feels a bit more like the 2E version of the ability and the character will hopefully get more usage out of it in the long run. Just my two cents.*)

Niles will then cast some illusion on me to make me appear like some freak of nature to the Goblins. Yeah I forgot to mention that we all have some new abilities and skills. When we landed in Martira Bay the others had a hard time keeping up with me. Without even realizing it, I seem to be walking faster. And my meditation seems to be paying off.

So at noon we arrive and Jern can't keep still. I think I should teach him some meditation. We wait and wait and finally Belig and two of his goons (one was hidden in the trees but was found easily) arrive at the crack of 12:30. I know he did it on purpose, but hey he is a dull witted imbecile, what can you expect? So not much conversation and I grow tired of small talk and attack! In the end the three Goblins get massacred except for one whom we leave alive by a thread Well now. Between the three of us we massacre the poor sods. Poor Belig. P.S – More to follow on Belig, I think he must have lost his head... (*Massacred might not be a strong enough word... And these aren't Goblins for the record, but Goblins... Let the players think they're facing Goblins, be unsure and sweat a little... ☺*).

After defeating them we search and find 43 gold coins, 2 Pearls and a Crystal. By the way I think all the Pearls and the crystal look exactly like a rock (*if you bother looking at the RL DM screen, you'll get an idea how well Miranda appraised the stuff*). Neat, eh?

Ok so since we have captured a dimwitted Goblin we ask him for a get-into-the-Goblin-lair-for-free card. No we learn that the leader of the Goblins is named Craig? (*Actually, it's Krig, but I don't think Miranda really cares one way or another at this point ☺...*) Their lair is one hour North from our current position. From what the surviving Goblin says about the lair, it appears that their **LAIR** is the warehouse we seek. The warehouse is after a small hill, literally (*Wow, getting accurate info from Goblins is so much fun!*).

Now I get to thinking. We need an edge against these Dimbulbs. So at first I try the **PECK SWEET SHAVING RAZOR** but I can't perform my beheading of the goblin champion. I just borrow Jern's sword and lo and behold Belig's head comes loose. I get a branch/stake and impale the head with it and off we go to the Warehouse.

Of course with our luck it all hits the fan. And we fall for a trap easily as Niles and I plunge into uncertainty. We hurt a little bit, but I've had worse. Niles makes it out first and all I hear is fighting. I finally do make it out. What do I see? Well it's Niles' pet cat, who I now dub Suicidal

Maniacal Cat. She is killing all these little lizard people by herself. Niles and Philippe have some scuz in their eyes so I try to help but I have no luck this day. Finally, after the monsters are dead except for two, we rest. I think Philippe was fed up of the 'lil buggers' and went off to hunt them so they didn't come back later. *(There were nine of them, Muckdwellers from Serpent Kingdoms, Forgotten Realms to be precise. It was very funny how these 1/4 CR creatures were cut down by the cat familiar and everybody else was either blinded for a round, fallen into a trap or just couldn't hit the side of a barn... Oh, and they're Tiny, so they had a good AC...)*

We will rest now until Philippe and Niles can get back their spells.

Session Four – Within the Circle from Dungeon #130

(Played October 29th, 2007)

November 17th, 750 : Outskirts of Thistle, Darkon

Yawn..... Stretch.....Oh what I'd give for a real bed. After my morning rations, sadly I realize that I have only one ration left. What I'd give for a home cooked meal and a soft bed...

After breakfast I climb down the Little Lizard People's trap and "collect" Belig's head. We trod on to the warehouse following Gblynn info, but discover an entrance that has not been used in quite a few years *(They figure out from the looks of it that baron Aulbesmil tried to burn down this main entrance years ago, but failed because of the pouring rain. They opt to use this entrance instead of the one given by the Gblyns.)*

Luck is with us for once and we enter with no trouble. We use our wand of stone shaping to make it through a passage that's been filled in with rocks and other debris, saving us much time. We make it inside the warehouse undetected (or so we think). Basically, for the whole day we battle Gblyns and rest and battle more Gblyns. We do find some coins and valuable objects. *(I didn't expect how much this session turned into a dungeon crawl. Even when they met the Gblynn babies [see below]. It was quite a change in pacing.)*

In one of the chambers, we encounter the "Matron Mother" Gblynn and kill her. In a pit are the Gblynn children. Philippe uses his bow to "take care" of the children. I can't watch. Nor am I sure I agree with the dealing of the goblin children, though that's a debate for another time. *(I was pretty surprised by this too I admit. But to Philippe they were only: "Just vermin...")*

After all is said and done, we do find a library! Imagine my luck indeed. I find six language books on Balok, High Mordentish, Falkovnian, Luktar, Vaasi and Lamordian! And I a language buff! This is better than gold, honestly. We also find portraits of some of Darkon's minor lords from the last twenty years: Baron Thalís Redtree from Nevuchar Springs (who is said to be Fey), baron Hans Warbois from Karg (a Dwarf deceased at least ten years ago), baron Oscari Gunderin from Tempe Falls (a Dwarf) and baroness Reldkasen from Martira Bay (a Human).

After a further search we find an interesting book after having battled these weird little insects that bite you and make you itch like crazy! This book has the symbol of the god Set on its cover. Set is a god from the Amber Wastes. We also find a drawing of the wolf god and some art objects of minimal worth.



November 18th, 750: Outskirts of Thistle, Darkon

Luckily for us Niles and Philippe can decode the book. Here is some of what they have decoded so far:

May 1st, year 725

... Joachim ApMorte, Abdelkrim Tahir and myself have met today. I am more than pleased with these first meetings. ... We are all unhappy with the Fraternity's ways... We want to choose another path...

... Joachim wants us to refer to him as John ApNeblu if ever in public as he is supposed to be lost in the Mists to our brethren. It would not do for the other Fathers to find out he still lives...

Abdel for his part has no plans about going back to Mudar in the Amber Wastes so he cares less about privacy and discretion...

... we try and make sense of the last few years in the Core. Some events attract our attention...

- 720, an outlander, a Death Knight known as lord Soth, enters our world, Sithicus is formed ... He naturally grabs hold of the land after a few months, becomes its Dread Lord...
- 722, Drakov invaded Darkon once again (for the fourth time really, but must we still pay attention to this ignorant warmonger? My colleagues seem to think so. Could he really be that hate-filled land's Lord) ... Azalin raised an army of undead to repel the invader. Again.

July 15th

... We gather and compare some of our ideas ... I was born in Darkon, yet I have fully rejected the Eternal Order's creed ...

... Joachim, a Forfarian, also renounced his Gods and their ways, especially Arawn, God of Death...

... Abdel introduces us to his God: Set. ... He still worships the Serpent God even though, part of its interests lies in Death and Necromancy...

October 31st

... I reveal my newly found feral nature to my friends...

They do not seem to mind that much, they were weary at first, but then realized how, on one hand, this can help us cast Azalin off the throne, stop his damned undead Kargat and, on the other hand, foil the Fathers of the Fraternity all over our lands from wasting their power in vain pursuits...

Last part of the book is about the religions of the Wolf God and Set:

Set.

Symbol: A coiled cobra

Domains: Death, Evil, and Trickery.

Wolf God.

Symbol: A snarling wolf's head or a single, bloody paw print.

Portfolio: Predators, the wilderness, hunting, savagery, blood, the moon, wolves, werewolves.

Domains: Animal, Chaos, Slaughter, Strength, and Trickery.

So this is all for this time. Sorry there isn't much but we battled most of the time and the rest was spent resting or reading. Until next time...

Miranda

(Whoever DMs Ravenloft might wonder where I am going with all this info [and believe me there is more to come!], but I do have some loose plan about all this. And it was prompted by discussions on the FoS's boards about how much info we should give players about the setting. I don't think players should always be clueless about any setting, AND I have two players out of three who are RL DMs themselves. So I am trying to "come clean" about a lot of this stuff in-game. I always wonder if it's worth it to hold ALL this info from the PCs, let's face it, players LIKE knowing about the world their PCs evolve in. Maybe it will have a scarier effect on them...)

Session Five – Within the Circle from Dungeon #130 / Interlude in Lamordia / Prelude to a loose adaptation of Raiders of the Black Ice from Dungeon #115

(Played November 22nd 2007)

November 19th, 750: Outskirts of Thistle, Darkon

We decided to stay a bit longer so that the boys could learn more from that tome we found. Each year represents roughly ten pages and there are entries for the years 725-727, 729-730. Oddly enough 728 is absent. Has to be a special year as I was born that year! The pages on religion take up about 75 pages. Still more to discover but I don't think we'll be giving this book to PyroBaron Aulbesmil.¹

We moved all the dead Gobllyn bodies to one room and closed the door so we could actually breath normal air and not rancid dead Gobllyn air. It took us about 30 minutes to do so. We find ourselves lacking in the food department so Philippe went out hunting. In the interim Whilst Niles

¹ This is one of those moments when you know you're doing something right with an NPC. The players really do not seem to know what to make of this guy.

is reading the tome and Philippe is going out hunting, I take time to acquaint myself with the High Mordentish book.

Philippe comes back just a few minutes later, telling us that a man and a woman are out hunting for someone. Luckily he got back unseen and told us. We decide that perhaps if someone were invisible he or she could follow the two hunters and perhaps learn something. Since Niles is the stealthiest, he casts the spell upon himself and ventures out into the forest in hope of finding out a bit more. He does try to follow them but unfortunately is heard so he hurries back to tell us. He did discover that there was in fact a third party with the man and black woman, but could not understand what was said as they were speaking in a foreign language. (The man is white and has some kind of chain mail and scimitar while the woman has very dark skin and seems to not have any weapons, she is probably a monk like me.) We debate whether to head back to the village or face the three. We decide that caution is our best option, as we have no clue as to how many we are facing. When we exit at the other side of the warehouse we get spotted after walking for a few minutes and 10 arrows fly at us, injuring us but not too badly.

The man and woman see us and yell out “*Stop in the name of Seigneur Mont-Mirebalais!*” In Souragnien. *We have a Souragnien among us. As it turns out it is not a coincidence that these people are after us and more specifically after Philippe.* (More on that in a bit!) The man and woman rush us so we have no choice but to fight (him with his weapons, her in a fighting technique similar to mine but not quite the same). We win rather easily and decide to retreat to the warehouse where we’ll have a better chance against ten people. Philippe, with a spell, entangles half of the search party then we head back into the warehouse where I hide in a room close to the entrance, hoping to surprise the new “*LEADER*” as the man we took care of seemed to be the old one. The new leader resembles the black woman in fighting styles so I figured it best if I fight him.

The plan almost worked but he saw me from my hiding spot. While that was going on the boys got free bolt shots and made them count against the search party. A fight ensues and we win yet again! We seem to be rather lucky in that department. Some of the search party are not killed. We start questioning them...

Now it seems that back in Souragne, Philippe got framed by the Mont-Mirebalais for the bloody murder of some maid. That’s probably the reason why he left there in the first place. Hmmm... So Philippe tells the survivors to return to Souragne with a message for Seigneur Mont-Mirebalais, who hired them all, to come himself to try to retrieve Philippe in person. Sounds like a fun time if ya ask me, really! Oh the maid’s name is Edmine and she was a servant of the Dessalines family.

Philippe assured us he was in fact a friend of Edmine and would never have thoughts of killing her. He also said the murder by blade was gruesome and could have been part of a dark ritual or something... What was in the mind of these snobbish and cruel Mont-Mirebalais? ²

We learn that the names of the first two people we killed in the search party were Olivier and Joséphine. It seems they belong to a group called *les Assermentés*, the Oathsworn³, and they have

² This was an unexpected development. Philippe’s story was secret and I did not want to spoil his surprise for him. At first, they wanted to flee which was what I was looking for and expected. I just wanted them to feel like someone was possibly after *them*, except for Philippe who would know the truth (part of the truth?). I really made sure not to name Philippe, instead calling in Mont-Mirebalais’ orders. It was funny seeing Philippe sweating it out. I had to improvise quite a bit, but it did help out the PCs cos I forgot a couple of things these guys had! ☺

pledged to catch Edmine's murderer. On them, we found some gold, a composite crossbow, dagger, scimitar, chain shirt and arrows for the crossbow. We do gather enough rations for a day and a half so we decide to stay one more day. From that strange Maison de l'Anneau journal we found, the boys, still deciphering the coded draconic in which it is written, managed to glimpse mentions of Joachim Aulbesmil (PyroBaron) in 726 & 727. In 729 Gabrielle Aderre of Invidia is mentioned. Finally in 730 Verbrek and Darkon's not-so-secret-police, the Kargat, are mentioned.

Then the boys find some strange references... And parts turning out to be a spellbook!

Excerpts from the Maison de l'Anneau journal...

A list of names with short notes.

- *Baron Thalís Redtree from Nevuchar Springs (a Fey male noble)*
- *Baron Hans Warbois from Karg (a Dwarf male noble)*
- *Baron Oscari Gunderin from Tempe Falls (a Dwarf male noble)*
- *Baroness Reldkasen from Martira Bay (a Human woman noble ready to do just about anything to move forward. She is said to study the arcane...)⁴*
- *In Souragne, the Mathurine family, with its thirst for knowledge, has potential for our society. Maybe we should introduce ourselves... Unless we let the power hungry Mont-Mirebalais take the initiative... (John and Abdel rightly point out that we could always throw them against each other...)*
- *In Zherisia's rural parts, some of our agents have managed to pinpoint the birth of a First through divinations... I went there myself. The child seems normal enough. I have not noticed anything out of the ordinary. I was tempted to sneak into the house at night and slit its throat.*
- *The extinct family Stross ruled in western Darkon for nearly 600 years, marrying well, fighting off major intrusion from the magocracy and holding its own against the advances of Falkovnia. They did it the old-fashioned way, with fistfuls of silver and a ruthless cruelty that scattered their enemies. The Stross, most of them mages themselves, were adepts of the Star and Shadows school of magic and devoted to the Goddess of Night & Magic... We should look deeper into their history...*

A list of new spells

(Source: Book of Roguish Luck from Malhavoc Press)

- *Black Hand (Shadowsworn 4, Sor/Wiz 4) – * This spell may attract the attention of the Watchers in Shadows...*

³ Please see *Arcana Unearthed / Arcana Evolved* for the really neat and flavorful Oathsworn core class.

⁴ These four are the nobles whose portraits were framed in the warehouse.

- Cloak of Darkness (Gutter Mage 2, Shadowsworn 2)
- Enter Shadow (Shw 3, Sor/Wiz 4)*
- Lengthen Shadows (Shw 0, Sor/Wiz 1)
- Moonscript (Drd/Shs 1)
- Peerless Camouflage (Brd 2, Gtrm 2 Shw2, Sor/Wiz 2)
- Shadow Blindness (Shw 0, Sor/Wiz 0)
- Shadow Bridge (Shw 3, Sor/Wiz 3)
- Shadow Knife (Shw 0, Sor/Wiz 0)
- Shadow Purse (Shw 1)
- Silhouette (Shw 0, Sor/Wiz 0)
- Smuggler's Veil (Gtrm 0, Shw 0, Sor/Wiz 0)
- Spit Shine (Brd 3, Gtrm 3)
- Step Under my Shadow (Gtrm 2, Shw 2)
- Switch Item (Gtrm 1, Sor/Wiz 1)
- Terror * (Shw 3, Sor/Wiz 3)
- Tongue of Fiends * (Clr 0, Shw 0, Sor/Wiz 0).

(Source: Year's Best D20 from Malhavoc Press)

- Shadow Stich (1st lvl)

(Source: RL Gaz II)

- Death Sight (Sor/Wiz 3)

November 20th, 750: Outskirts of Thistle, Darkon.

It's now snowing rather heavily but we deem it a fair trade off and head back to Thistle. Unfortunately for us, it becomes a full blown snowstorm, so instead of taking us **five** hours, it is now dark and we are nowhere close to arriving. We make ourselves a makeshift tent and stay there for the night. Oh joy, Oh joy! Sleeping in the great outdoors in a snowstorm, something every young woman dreams of doing when she is young... NOT!!!!

November 21st, 750: Lost in a Darkonian snowstorm?

Still way too much snow.

November 22nd, 750: Somewhere in Darkon?

Too much snow.

November 23rd, 750: Darkon?

So we travel and discover we are no longer in Darkon. Just peachy keen. I really love being lost and not knowing where I am, don't you? We see a village in the distance and enter, heading for an inn. Goal: Hot food, a bath and a soft bed, not in that particular order mind you. After we get rooms, we get a meal and discover we are not in Darkon anymore but in Lamordia, the village of

Furchtenburgit⁵ to be exact. Neufurchtenberg⁶ is northwest from here. Have no idea how that is helpful but hey it's better than breaking kneecaps for information eh?

We decide to spend the night there till the snow stops... There is NOTHING happening here. Middle of nowhere.⁷

After a couple of days, guess what? THE SNOW STOPPED!!! So we decide to finally head out to Thistle. So as we are leaving the village, we come upon the frozen body of a man. He appears dead from fatigue or the cold. We're not experts so that's our opinion. Of course being the curious types that we are, we find inside his jacket a paper with the words...

“Raiders have taken Tonnsburg, our village and have enslaved everyone. They have plundered the village and I fear the worst. They have fed some of the bodies to their wolves. Please send help at once. They have looted everything we have... Direct your questions to the bearer of this note. He has seen these strange raiders many a time.”
Signed: Haarold Ventas & Nixa Foxtail.

Apparently the Mayor paid Haarold Vendis to go to Tonnsburg to help them out? I may have been a little tired near the end of our trek you see. There's also the town or city of Neufurchtenberg mentioned. Bah I'm too tired and want to go sleep in an actual bed, so I'll talk to you later. Hopefully it'll be from Thistle or Nartok. Until then...

Session Six – Interlude in Lamordia / A loose adaptation of *Raiders of the Black Ice* from Dungeon #115

(Played XXX 2007)

November 23th, 750: Outskirts of Thistle, Darkon

⁵ Do **not** look it up in your gazetteer. You won't find it. ☺

⁶ This you **may** look up if you want.

⁷ It was pretty funny how they all expected the innkeeper to turn into a serial killer or the inn's few patrons or villagers to turn into werewolves or something.

Session Six – Interlude in Lamordia: *Of Winter Storms and Chance Meetings...* / A loose adaptation of *Raiders of the Black Ice* from *Dungeon #115* (cont'd)

(Played December 19th, 2007)

November 23rd, 750: Furchtenburbit, Lamordia

For three days, the guys transcribed the journal while I read up on my Lamordian. Nice book, gotta love my luck on having found these six language books eh? So after all is said and done, we decide that yes we'll go to Tonnsborg from here (The bellybutton of nowhere really¹) to help the Tonnsborg citizens against the invaders.

We buy provisions from the only store in a three hundred mile radius if not more and get some good deals especially on the portable hut. It takes us two days to get there.

November 25^h, 750: Tonnsborg, Lamordia

Tonnsborg is a fishing/hunting village with some pelts being made there. According to what we gleaned in Furchtenburbit (*Funny name if you can speak French and play with it*), about one hundred and fifty people live in Tonnsborg. As we approach the village we can see around twenty buildings and next to the village is a river, twenty-five to forty feet wide at some places. We also see boats at the river even though it's winter. (*The river hasn't frozen.*)

I spot two forms on one building and one on another. A wolf attacks us and dies quickly. Guess we are getting better at cleaning up on enemies. Two of the three forms jump down and battle ensues. Too busy to realize that the third form is getting away, we kick some serious barbarian butt. One gets knocked out, and as to the other, Niles magically charms it. So Mag, that's his name – barbarians need a little more on the vocabulary by the way, grunting and fighting won't get ya understood in the real world. So Mag has this ring and I think he's supposed to be married but we don't get it. I even get to practice my Lamordian! Sweet deal indeed!

We learn a name from Mag: Letvar and the third form who got away is named Angmesh. We inspect the house that "Angmesh" was in before he took off to find some kind of journal stating inventory in Tonnsborg as well as short list of how many villagers there are, I think (My memory can wander at times – who has time to take notes anyways... "Yes excuse me ya stinking barbarian just give me a moment while I note how bad you smell and how ugly you really are").

So we decide to leave the charmed Mag in Tonnsborg with his limp unconscious buddy to guard the village... he seems to actually, um, trust us and appears to be eager to help if only so he can marry back home? (That ring he showed us must mean he wants to marry).²

¹ This has got to be the funniest euphemism I've seen in a while! And no I will not say what I called it during my game ☺. The idea was to say how nothing ever happens in remote Lamordia.

² Actually, this is Miranda's journal so we get her point of view... Philippe and Niles had different interpretations of Mag and his ring. We'll see if this comes back...

We leave Tonnsborg for the mountains Mag pointed out to us where some Citadel is supposed to be. We camp for the night and Philippe has a bad dream. Basically, a repeat of what happened in the old warehouse but he is PyroBaron and kills children. But when he passes in front of a mirror he sees his own face and then the Goblyn children he killed. Creepy.

November 26th, 750: travelling in Lamordia

So as we travel we come upon a group of five people early in the afternoon. There's an encampment and the people look civilized, two women and three men. We meet a Balfour de Casteelle, Imron Gauthfallow, George Weathermay and Laurie & Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove (twins). Apparently Niles has heard of this George. I haven't. I might need to get out more in the future.

They got lost in the *mystical* storm as we did and were heading for Darkon. Apparently they were headed for Karg and its university there so Balfour (a scholar of mysteries) could teach there or give some seminar. It seems the twins are searching for a Dr Rudolph Van Richten, whoever he is. Apparently he is a *famous* monster hunter? To put it mildly, never heard of him, so he can't be that important. I've heard of the king Azalin Rex now that's an important person. Where was I? Oh yes... Van Richten... Supposedly he disappeared over the Summer and the two girls have their knickers in an uproar over him being missing.³

Imron introduces himself as a scholar with some arcane abilities. He is rather pleasant and chitchats about all kinds of things but does go on a bit too much about his interest in painting... He is now looking for a place to retire to a quiet life he says: He is looking into Darkon and says Paridon might even interest him (!).⁴

George is really sociable with us and seems to have a horseshoe stuck up his behind, hence the stiff walk eh. Ok so we share information with them a little about what we are up to. We all have a grand ole time until a shape comes out of the mists or woods. We shout for the person to identify himself. He whispers: "John ApNeblu..." and falls face first into the snow. So many people, so little time to be antisocial with them all. Ah what can ya do? Grin and bear it I suppose. So we revive this unconscious form and discover that lo and behold it is John ApNeblu a.k.a Joachim from the Maison de l'Anneau's journal. But imagine our surprise when we see his (its?) face: he looks sort of like a lizard man.

Well, as usual our information gathering goes awry and we scare the crap out of John and he flies away (Yes I am no mage but it is quite obvious what spell he cast – Unfortunately I can't jump that high or he'd have been dead meat, minced even).

So John Boy gets away. We do learn from one of the twins that one of them was nearly infected with lycanthropy but luckily was cured. George must have taken that the wrong way because he shut up real fast and got kind of creepy quiet on us. He went off to bed and the twins told us that Gennifer or Laurie [dunno which one] was attacked by a lyncathrope by the name of Natalia Vhorishkova. She got cured but I think George wants revenge on it for nearly infecting his niece.

³ To say that I did not expect van Richten to get this kind of treatment in a campaign journal is such an understatement. But you know what? You gotta LOVE my group, I honestly never know what to expect from them!

⁴ Remember my campaign does not have "Claimed by Darkon" memory loss.

We learned that ApNeblu was a caliban. Just a lil odd enough fella, really. We asked him a few times yet got no answer. Probably lying through his teeth, the bastard.⁵ After he flies away we split company with the other five with promises to leave notes or messages in Darkon with news of what is going on about the Maison de L'Anneau...

Session Seven – A loose adaptation of *Raiders of the Black Ice* from Dungeon #115 (cont'd)

(Played January 10th, 2008)

November 27th, 750: en route to the citadel in the mountains.

We track Angmesh and his group into the mountains. We come to a river about twenty-five feet wide but not that deep. It isn't frozen either. There are rocks big enough to hop across on, so we proceed to do just that. Of course if something can go wrong it usually does. The Divine Law I'll call it from now on. Niles and I make it across safely by hopping on the rocks, but Philippe falls in. A water-like woman creature emerges from the water, and grabs him by the neck. We need to pay a toll to this creature so we can cross: A toll in blood. I get a knife from Niles. Being the *healthiest* person in our band, I cut my arm and pay the toll. My blood drips in the river until she seems satisfied then she lets Philippe go and we move on.⁶

We continue traveling and come upon a dead caribou and two dead wolves. They're frozen solid and covered in white lichen. Philippe notices a silver thread in the lichen. That is really odd. I'm no scientist of course but I doubt lichen usually has silver threads in it. We also notice this *effect* spreads out somewhat... We walk around this at a safe distance.

We travel a bit further and, in the distance, we see twelve villagers led by what looks like barbarians and four dogs, two each leading a sled. The villagers consist of four men, six women and two girls.

A combat ensues and as usual we emerge victorious though some of the bad guys escaped. During combat, not only were they attacking us with hand axes, but one of them also sent out waves of cold at us! We inspect the dead barbarians close up. Their leader, his skin is actually colder than the temperature outdoors at first. His skin even has a fake wax-like quality: He is not human! Once he's been dead a few minutes it becomes the same as the outdoor temperature. He had a battle axe, studded leather and twenty silver pieces. We keep the coins but leave the villagers the armor and weapon. As it turns out the villagers weren't badly treated and were very grateful for our rescue. We accompany them for two hours. They head back to Tonnsborg while we head for the citadel. Oh by the way. In our fight, Niles' killer kitty helped us, and did a really good job. So the question we really have to ask is this: Who is the familiar, Niles or Killer Kitty!⁷ We do finally come upon the citadel but judge it wise to rest and inspect it more closely in the morning.

⁵ Again, this is Miranda's point of view... I seem to recall Philippe being somewhat more intrigued by John's appearance.

⁶ I was surprised to see them accept this deal so quickly. I don't even remember them trying Sense Motive or anything. They didn't even ask who she was! Miranda inflicted herself 4hp of damage!

⁷ This is one of those funny situations that just happens. You cannot, as a DM, create this without looking like an idiot, but Niles just kept rolling from 3 to 7 on his attack roll while his cat familiar had something

November 28th, 750: Closer to the citadel.

In the morning, we finally get to the citadel. We inspect it in *stealth mode*. The first story of the citadel has two doors but no windows or arrow slits (P.S – in French arrow slits are way cool⁸). The second story does have arrow slits, but no windows. The third story has arrow slits and what we believe are Neanderthals inside. Someone could, in effect, sneak into the tower unseen by climbing. No thanks. I don't relish the thought of Miranda road kill after falling from three stories. And on top of this, we find this strange "frost" lichen covering the outer walls. So I say: No way are we climbing! The citadel appeared to be on alert all day because the surviving Neanderthals spilled the beans on us I suppose. By the time evening rolled around, the security returned to the lackadaisical way it probably was before we kicked some Neanderthal butt.

November 29th, 750: Ground Zero – Bad Guys Citadel

So we discuss strategy and decide the safest way in is by using the stoneshape wand⁹ and create a secret door. We enter and lucky for us, we come upon a sleeping wolf. Cha-ching! One down. There's a door in the room, so we listen. In Lamordian, I hear, "*Bedtime. Shut Up!*" We silently open the door and see six villagers, three Neanderthals and one wax-like human freak of nature. We can also hear people speaking on the floor above ours. We enter and by surprising the four dimbulbs, we defeat them. We notice two things about wax-man:

- One: It has white eyes.
- Two: And we find a necklace with a strange earpiece. No clue what that is!

We proceed to another door and listen but hear nothing. I give the six villagers my last waterskin. They're grateful and all but I'm not really a people person. So we send them off. Opening the next door we see a wax-woman in a hammock in what appears to be a kitchen? Ok so we defeat her though she pleaded with us. Hey lady, you take villagers hostage and we should be lenient with you? Not on my watch, you dumbass.¹⁰

There stairs lead to the lower level so we take them. Of course we hear human voices and descend. We emerge into a room. Getting overconfident or cocky, you chose one, we fail to notice a foe in a dark corner. A battle ensues and we do win, but Philippe nearly dies, and both Niles and I are in a bad way. That's it for now. I'll write again soon, once the guys and me are in better shape and have perhaps defeated the citadel villains.¹¹

like three critical hits I assumed it was some kind of humbling experience for them all. ☺. And Miranda makes it sound as if it was an easy fight, but I think I remember seeing Joël (Philippe) wondering if they shouldn't have put more thought into this fight before getting into it. They were pretty outnumbered for a while.

⁸ An arrow slit in French is a "meurtrière": a murderess.

⁹ That's the wand they found during their adventure with the Dromdals in Paridon during *Shut-In* in Dungeon 128.

¹⁰ Things are getting rather personal for Miranda here...

¹¹ They were getting pretty reckless towards the end. And Miranda forgets to mention how Niles did a Shocking Grasp on this creature and how it healed after it was almost done for! Ha... Good times... ☺

Session Eight – A loose adaptation of *Raiders of the Black Ice* from Dungeon #115 (cont'd and end)

(Played February 4th, 2008)

Nov 29th, 750: Citadel, somewhere in Lamordia's mountains...

So we saved the last seven villagers. On this room's wall in the citadel is a tapestry. We see a bump behind it. Oh the tapestry is around eight feet high by fifteen feet wide. *Maybe the villagers will carry it back for us? The guys seem to think it's worth a pretty penny, well try between fifteen hundred to two thousand gold pieces.* Before I forget, the tapestry is a scene of a hunter on horseback hunting a wild boar in the summer. In Barovia, we think. So anyways, we move the tapestry and find a humanoid form encased in ice in the wall. We only see the head and shoulders sticking out. It has a human face but gold? Its eyes are closed. And it is not an armor! Weird...

In the room are crates of provisions. Of course not really thinking sometimes, we give the seven villagers more than enough provisions (and when, later, we eventually leave the villagers to regroup and plan our next move, we don't keep any for ourselves. Neat eh?). Ok so where was I? Yeah so Philippe thinks it might be a good idea to free the gold man: He has a 'good feeling' about this. We use torches to melt it enough to liberate it from the ice. It takes us roughly ten minutes. When it wakes up (to the sound of internal gears!), it looks at us funnily. Turns out it has a name: Oskari Lodestar. It has a little bit of amnesia and has probably been frozen for the last fifty years as its speech is about that old. It has a monotonic voice.

As we leave, using that secret door made with our wand of stone shape, one of the villagers makes a noise to alert the people in the citadel and a trap door opens in the ceiling. *[The DM said we should kill this villager, but being the really nice people we are, of course we didn't. Yeah that's my story and I'm sticking to it¹²]* Some ray fires down at me as we are leaving and I feel like I lose almost half my strength. I see a waxman up there, the bastard! Er, yes, so we let the seven villagers out before us and then flee. Once we set them on their merry way (with ALL the supplies!), we head for the little cave we found earlier. There we rest until the morning.

Nov 30th, 750: A cave near the Citadel, Lamordia.

Yes, so we wake up and as I stated earlier we had no food since we were only thinking of the villagers. We heal up first then Niles goes hunting. But before he can get far enough, he spies four Neanderthals and three wolves heading our way. I am thinking they were looking for us and were sent by the waxman. A battle ensues and we win. Hey! Oskari can speed up our metabolisms so we can fight better and be harder to attack. Nice little trick he does indeed. So we win again. Well the last fight we had was bad but this one went fine. We killed all but two wolves who fled after we killed one of them. We discover some sort of morphogenetic implant in one of the dead Neanderthals ear¹³. It's decided that it would be beneficial to actually use it, so Niles keeps it. It basically allows you to speak with animals twice per day

¹² Somehow I get the feeling it did not happen this way... I don't remember how I worded this, but I think I was making fun of a certain character with a somewhat skewed sense of honor... Now, that's my story and I'm sticking to it! ☺

¹³ Gotta LOVE Lamordian science!

or understand them for that matter. Philippe hunts and we rest until evening. Then we return to the citadel by the back door.

Niles hears wolves inside and they're waiting for us because they heard us arriving as we are the stealthiest people ever ... **NOT!** ... So we open the door and we dispose of the wolves. At another door we see a waxman. Of course I get anxious to kick some wax butt. Moving to intercept him I run into what acts like two zombies first! (They seem dead and have all kinds of wires sticking out of them...) Well yet another fight ensues with the same outcome. Waxman is trying to escape via a rope ladder to the trap door. Niles and I, of course wishing to help him on his way, shake the rope and the poor waxman falls twenty feet. Poor, poor waxman. Ok so we fight him and finally beat his ass! We search the citadel now and discover we are done fighting.

It turns out the waxman had scientific bracers which Niles takes¹⁴. We find sleeping quarters and there we find a bronze necklace, a silver torc and rabbit fur. Nothing of interest is on the second floor. In the tower we find a laboratory. All kinds of boring science gadgets here... Yawn... So there are journals of how the waxmen came to be¹⁵. There is also a book detailing a Lamordian family and some of their theories: The Mordenheims.¹⁶ These we keep. The rest of the laboratory we totally destroy. Smashing and breaking is real fun when you get to do it. See, you can vent doing this, which helps a person keep her cool. There's also a book, *The Cosmology of Lamordia*, which I keep. I like books on languages and lands. Information is food for the brain. The more you know...

Ok, so we leave the citadel and part company with Oskari Lodestar our new mechanical friend. He asks where he can find us or leave a message in case he ever needs to contact us. We tell him the University in Karg or my parents' home in Paridon. We make it to Tonnsborg and tell the people it's over. We get a reward plus we cash in the tapestry¹⁷. The Mayor Harold Veendis is more than happy to pay us and we are now like heroes in Tonnsborg. Whatever, I'm no hero. I'm just venting my frustrations on bad people is all. So we leave Tonnsborg and make it out of Lamordia... Good riddance. I hope we never return. *I wonder if Balfour de Casteelle will leave us any messages or the others in that party for that matter. I so don't want to give Pyro Baron the book. He can kiss my behind.* Now we head for Nartok and it is now December 4th! Christmas is just around the corner... Joy.

Ok until next time...

¹⁴ Those are bracers which, when activated, repel metal, i.e.: swords and other metal weapons. I thought it was a neat treasure and better than the ever-loving bracers of defense. And it fit in well with Lamordian science again. Advantage: They are not magical so cannot be dispelled. Disadvantage: They are not magical and only work for so many rounds every day.

¹⁵ The "waxmen" as Miranda calls them were created by a Lamordian scientist who just gave up on them. All they can feel is his indifference towards them and it is driving them insane. That's the major reason they were capturing villagers, so they could learn about life and what it means to be alive. They wanted to prove themselves worthy of their creator. Yes they turned out to be a pathetic evil bunch...

¹⁶ Basically I gave them *Legacy of the Blood: Great Families of the Core*. I told them they could read the Mordenheim section and they could use it in any way they wanted if they studied it. My reason behind this is that if nobody uses that book what's the use? It's a really good RL book. And I don't have any Mordenheim PCs or NPCs at the moment. We'll see if they like it...

¹⁷ Since it's a small village, they get something like 700GP for something worth that has a market price of roughly 2000GP. Still, they were happy cos there was no way they were schlepping that around in the snow on the way back to Nartok, Darkon.

Session Nine – Return to Nartok

(Played February 28th, 2008)

4th of December 750 - 7th of December 750

We travel intensely for three days and travel back to Thistle to make sure things are ok. There, we learned that goblins had not returned. The antidote the PyroBaron sent had worked and the villagers were no longer sick. The Baron had sent a lackey, Ghini¹⁸, to check up on the villagers. Seeing as nothing much else was going on in Jolly Old Thistle, we decided to travel to Nartok. It takes another two days. We discuss (at great lengths!) what we want to tell the PyroBaron during our travel. This is what we have decided: We say nothing about the book (detailing the Maison de l'Anneau's history + some spells from the Stars & Shadows school of magic¹⁹) but decide to tell him of the library and the paintings of nobles from 20 years past found in the depot (said depot he was supposed to have burned down when asked by the Maison!). I like the idea of that. He rubs me the wrong way and I just as much see him dead in the sewers than alive and kicking.²⁰

9th of December 750 : Nartok, Darkon

We're in Nartok!

Here is a work in progress for the city of Nartok, Darkon. It's a blend of Nartok (RL Gaz II) and Zobeck (Wolfgang Baur's default setting Open Design) with just a dash of NPCs from Dungeon 131. I gave this info to the players to give them a better sense of the city since it's different from canon And especially since Patrice (Niles) does not know RL too well). It is a mix of both Ravenloft and Zobeck. Bear in mind that some things MIGHT be somewhat altered when Open Design 5 comes out and is played.

City of Nartok

Nartok has been slightly influenced from Lamordia and its scientific achievements (but, still, not everybody trusts mechanical devices).

Population : 8000 to 10,000 depending on the season (because of the lumber trade), Mixed (Human 85%, Fey-touched – half-elf – 2% Dwarf 10%, Caliban 3%²¹)

- (The Calibans of the Nartok region speak a Darkonian pidgin. Anybody speaking Darkonese may make an intelligence check to understand DC: 15.)

Authority figures:

- Baron Joaquim Aulbesmil
- Chief Constable Turner Miktis
- Alexis Aulbesmil, cpt of the citywatch.

¹⁸ The heroes met her during their voyage from Paridon. She is some fighter type with a stick up her butt to be honest... She is Ghini from *Dungeon 131*.

¹⁹ See either *Kobold Quarterly 3* by Open Design or *The Book of Roguish Luck* by Malhavoc Press.

²⁰ Miranda sure has a dark side...

²¹ Zobeck has a high Kobold population. This did not work for me so I changed them to Calibans.

- Ghini Eagleye (close advisor to the Baron)

Important locations:

- Arcane Collegium:
 - o Guildmaster Orlando;
 - o The staff is composed of sixty people.
 - o The Collegium has seven buildings in the city.
- City Barracks (with guards)
- Docks and River Gate
- Great South Gate
- Lord Baron's Hall (city archives)
- Leatherworker's Guildhall

Nartok is a mercantile city of roughly 8,000 to 10,000 people (depending on the season). Its livelihood depends on the river trade, with important North-South road connections.

It is home to an Arcane Collegium of almost a hundred apprentices, scribes, and masters, and it is known for its odd and small devotion to the Gear Goddess, who gave the city the gift of steam power and gearing (which some argue is simply Lamordian science). Surrounded by the rest of Darkon's realm (a magocracy – of one some would say), Falkovnia and the Shadow Rift, it survives by its wits.

Here's a list of place names and locations:

- 1- **The Arcane Collegium:** It's arcanists and scholars come from far and wide, and form a university in many arts, not just the arcane.
- 2- **Crown Square:** The posh address where merchants and the wealthy have their homes. The two public buildings here are the Baron's Hall and Courthouse.
- 3- **Part of the Vuchar river:** flows north to south near the Collegium, but there's a bend not long after; it travels wide and slow from west to east near the warehouse district.
- 4- **The Margreve Forest to the South...**

Humans, calibans, and dwarves are residents of the city. Elves are known but not residents, yet a fair number of fey-touched live in the city.

We enter the city and head for Old Nartok and the Veteran Arms inn. Inside, there are exotic arms and weapons all over the walls. Anyways, we get rooms and ask the innkeeper, with a nice 10gp bribe²², to find someone to get us into contact with Lord Joaquim "PyroBaron" Aulbesmil and also a person to buy what we'd acquired in our travels. As a sidenote, I guess that flaunting gold around isn't such a good idea, because I discover later in the day that I was pick pocketed. Oh well the person probably needed it more than I did? Whatever. Ok so an Asheron Coyl is to meet us the next day at 11am and then the PyroBaron at 1pm.

Asheron Coyl arrives at the appointed time. And he is a native of Paridon. He is an importer/exporter. The three masterwork goblin daggers are worth 450 gp, the crown 50 gp and the ceremonial bowl and

²² They really managed to buy everything with this one... The innkeeper wasn't so helpful at first, but once he got some gold, connections started to appear...

knife he will find a collector for, not a user. No price given. He leaves to find some buyers. The guys go read some more about the book but don't seem to learn anything new...²³

So it's one o'clock, time for our meeting with Pyrodude. A stinky looking decrepit man enters and nods once to the Innkeeper and heads upstairs. Well, well, guess who came for lunch? The innkeeper tells us to go up to room so and so on the second floor. As we begin to ascend the stairs, three men enter the inn. Geez, like no one will notice that they're the PyroBarons guards? This is way too fun so I descend and walk up to them. "You're Lord Aulbesmil's guards aren't you?" I state. They act all innocent and stuff. That was fun, I think to myself.²⁴ So we go to the room, knock and then enter. Little conversation with PyroBaron ensues. We tell him of the paintings and the library, explaining to him that we didn't burn the place down because maybe he might want to investigate the library and ex-warehouse. Also told him the goblins were taken care of. He seems happy about that, about the villagers being safe, but who can tell with these stinkin' blue bloods?

So this'n that and he ends up giving us this magical ring he was given by the Maison de l'Anneau people years ago (!) (a black snake-shaped ring biting its tail). He also tells us that he thinks he's in danger, that the Maison might want to get rid of him... But he's sort of confused and paranoid if you ask me! Then all of a sudden he lights up the room magically! I almost pound on him! What the...?! Is he crazy casting spells without warning? I think he's asking for a beating and I let him know! He *sort of* apologizes and explains he developed sorcerous abilities a bit over six months ago. He also thinks the Maison *knew* he would get those and that's why they chose him. Yeah. Sure. That was 20 years ago!

So anyways he gets ready to leave. I am of course my usual polite self and ask him to salute his guards for me downstairs, with a big smile on my face. I think he didn't like that because he gave me a look like he wanted to spank me or something. Sorry you're not my type. Oh, he did offer to pay us 5gp a day as a retainer to stick around, but I don't think I wanna do that.

A few minutes after he leaves a falcon taps at our window. Hey! It's Imron Gauthfallow's birdie. So opening the window, we find a note attached to its leg. After taking the note, the falcon flies away.

Letter from Imron Gauthfallow

Dear fellow adventurers

- *I have to apologize for lying to you. I could not talk in front of such a crowd when we met. I did hear of the Maison de l'Anneau during my travels of youth, I even met some of them during my years of adventuring... I would rather not reveal their identities right now out of respect for them, but of the Fraternity of Shadows I cannot say much I'm afraid.*
- *Amongst other things, I heard about the Maison destroying a nest of ghouls in the forests near Karg quite a few years ago. And putting to rest the sorrowful ghost of a mother who even in death kept looking for her son in Mordent. They apparently wrote some kind of treatise about Forlorn and some kind of time-shift effect in that realm...*
- *Some of the last rumours were that they were looking into the Shadow Rift, trying to find ways to restrain the Fey from invading the Core.*

²³ It's pretty funny seeing them roll these insanely low numbers while trying to decipher this book they've had for weeks now... ☺ Well sooner or later...

²⁴ Great Disguise for the baron, but since they were waiting for him and the guy likes going incognito... Then a great Spot from Miranda for the guards. Darn. ☺

- *Personally I have searched for something called the Crown of Air & Darkness for quite some time but never found it. It is supposed to be some evil artefact created by an ancient Goddess and possibly tied to the Fey. According to legends it must be destroyed or it shall bring an Age of Darkness to the world. I leave this task to younger people now...*
- *I once stopped an Ancient Dead from properly rising in Mudar in Har'Akir. Somehow wood could hurt that undead horror... I keep thinking of painting the scene. (Something to occupy my retirement years.)*
Good luck with all your heroic endeavours,
Imron Gauthfallow, scholar and retired adventurer.²⁵

We discuss this note. Maybe those Maison guys aren't so bad? Niles magically identifies the ring given by PyroBaron. He finds out it is an object attuned to sorcerers.²⁶ We also head out to the King's Head Tavern to talk and find out about rumors in the city. After a few well spent gold pieces, we hear about guys from Souragne in black offering a reward for Philippe about the murder of a servant girl. Well, Philippe wastes no time and starts bluffing his way through the evening and turns the rumors around against the Mont-Mirebalais! Good for him! In the Duchy of Nartok, somewhere in the west, there are brigands causing trouble. There is talk of a beautiful black haired woman, a thief in Nartok as well. Maybe she took my gems?

Ok so that's it for now. Kinda tired, it's midnight here.

Session Ten – Return to Nartok (Cont'd) / Prelude to *Dungeon* **#131²⁷**

(Played March 17th, 2008)

December 10th, 750 Nartok, Darkon

Once we've slept sufficiently and the boys have studied for their spells we are ready for our next meeting with the PyroBaron. This time we don't see any of his "*pals*". Oh well I guess I must still have been tired. We see him in a room again. He appears afraid for some reason. My thinking is that it's been twenty years and this Fraternity has probably forgotten about him and I tell him so. He tells us that not only are there brigands at Aulbes but there are ferocious beasts southwest of Nartok near the Oros bridge to Aulbes. He sent his nephew Lysander two weeks ago but he never came back. Then he sent his "bodgyguard" Ghini and no word back from her either.

²⁶ The Ring of Sorcerers (inspired by Denizens of Freeport, p. 34) (Poor Niles, the Wizard, identifies the ring and hands it to Philippe!)

- Increase the DC of each sorcerer spell cast by the wearer by +1. If the target of the spell is another sorcerer, the DC is +2;
- The wearer gains a +2 to all saving throws made versus spells cast by another sorcerer;
- The wearer may apply the Maximize Spell feat to any spell 1/day without changing the level of the spell.
- Sense sorcerer: Spellcraft check DC: 30 (or DC 30 minus spell level if there is an active spell in the area. 2/day. Range 100'.

²⁷ I'll reveal the name of the adventure later on. Although I like this adventure, it's got one of those stupid names that gives away too much... ☺

He did bring us two objects to help us as we did decide to go investigate. I even told him.... *gasp...*
gasp... gasp... **THANK YOU.** I think it must have been a slip of the tongue. I mean I guess he had his reasons to burn down the warehouse back then. I did some foolish things in my youth as well. So yeah, he gave us a silver dagger²⁸ which is good against lycanthropes²⁹. Also whoever is holding it can create a light source once per day if they concentrate. And they can have some kind of insight if they concentrate while holding it, twice a day. Niles will use the dagger. The other thing is a scroll³⁰. Basically it is a ceremony to link a person with their weapon. Meaning they can even call the item to them if it is thirty feet away or some distance like that. And as the person develops their skills, they get special abilities thanks to this ceremony. You have to read the scroll and it's like a ritual, if you prefer, that takes 24 hours. I took it.

Pyro can get us a carriage and horses so we can pretend to be merchants to perhaps trick the brigands at Aulbes so they attack us and we catch them.

So we ask him for provisions for our trip, like rations and perhaps some potions of healing as we've no priest or cleric. For the horses and carriage we should go see our ole pal Asheron Coyl. For the potions we need to go see a *chevalier* named Silas Armand at the apothecary. I guess the Pyro man is really appreciative of our help after all. I did thank him again. The voice of the **DIVINITY OF MANKIND** *whispers in my head...wedding bells wedding bells....*(P.S that would be the guys teasing me about Miranda being nice to Lord Aulbesmil).

After he leaves, we decide to go see Silas Armand later in the day. He gives us five potions of quintessence³¹ which will come in handy. Niles and I take two and Phil takes one. We go get the carriage and horses from Asheron. He hasn't found a buyer for the bowl from the goblins. For the rest of the time, we rest until the next day while I perform the ritual.

11th December, 750 Nartok, Darkon

For most of the day we rest and at night we leave for Aulbes. Niles and Phil ride up on the carriage while I follow by foot. When I tire I do go in the carriage to catch my breath. Nothing really happens for the first few hours. In our tenth hour of travel we hear squeaks at the side of the fifteen feet wide road. Thanks to the torches up on the carriage we can see. Some big looking rats are there, quite a few of them actually. Niles and Phil attack with their ranged weapons from the carriage and I from the ground. I rush one. A battle ensues, where we win. Phil cast this neat spell where the brush and roots from the ground, well, tangled the beasts up. Neat one. We are an hour from Aulbes and continue on our way, whereupon we arrive in Aulbes at around 5am. We enter the village. The buildings we do see are made of stone and haven't been painted in a while. We do come upon The Sylvan Glade Inn. Curiously, at 5am there are lights on. We leave the carriage at the stable. Then we enter the Inn where I think we tick off the sleepy

²⁸ [Aulbesmil Masterwork silver dagger](#): at 3rd character level: *Light* (Int or Wis mod / day – as per char level) + *Insight* (2/day)

²⁹ Please do appreciate the subtle metagaming at work here... “Would such a skill mean that my character knows this?” DM rolls his eyes and says throw a die... ☺ And it's pretty funny how everyone assumes their on a werewolf hunt by now!

³⁰ [Bonded Item \(variation from Arcana Evolved\) scroll of ceremony \(improving with every second level after.\):](#) character level required 3rd: + 1 to a weapon; at 5th level: Mage Hand on weapon (Cha mod / day. Min 1);

³¹ God, I LOVE Van Richten's Arsenal!!!

Innkeeper. I guess I'd be ticked off too if I was working at 5am and got bothered by three travelers. He gets us our rooms. I don't know about you but there are five or six people there. Do people sleep in Aulbes?³² Ok so the Innkeeper is a little talkative and we find out that he did see Ghini last week but hasn't seen Lysander. Also there used to be a silver mine which dried out a few years ago, but lord Aulbesmil kept his word and still protects the village even though it probably costs him more money. There is also a garrison protecting the village. That's it for now. Oh, before I forget I feel more capable in my abilities since the huge rat battle. I am presuming that the boys do as well. I feel a little change, but it's all for the better and will help us in our travels.³³

Until next time...

Miranda in Aulbes...

Session Eleven – Adventure from *Dungeon* #131³⁴

(Played April 17th, 2008)

December 12th, 750. Village of Aulbes, Darkon.

It's early morning, so we settle in at our table. Some clients leave and then two guards come in. They see us and approach our table asking us who we are rather rudely. We tell them we're here on official business for Lord Aulbesmil. Anyways, these guards seem to be hard headed and after a bit of discussion they ask us to stay there while they get their captain. Well la-de-da, guess who their captain is? Ghini the Lord's bodyguard. So the rumor was true she has been seen in Aulbes. So anyways the Ice Queen, that's how I like to think of her by the way. She recognizes us so her dull-witted guards relax. Apparently there are guards who aren't doing their jobs properly at the village entrance. Why am I not surprised about this? Ok so we tell her why we're there and ask a few questions. We are told that beasts roam around the village at night. This began about six months ago when the village began losing trappers and lumberjacks at the rate of one or two per month.

Also, the old captain of the guard tried to go find another beast whose tracks have been seen around the village. This beast is thought to be a bear. We get the location of the bear's den from Ghini. And she tells us that maybe Lysander is at his uncle's hunting lodge which is about one and a half hours to the west of Aulbes. The den is about an hour north from Aulbes. The latest caravan lost a guard who disappeared and another now works at the Inn, his name being Durmain. (I don't think he's a singer though heh heh.) Ghini is willing to hire us to go see the bear's den.

Ghini tells us the villagers are nervous and no one goes out at night or is allowed out for that matter. Everyone hates the miller for the simple reason they think he is stealing from them. So Durmain arrives at the Inn and we get him to talk thanks to Phil's generosity. Durmain was a guard for this Erthorn fellow with two other guards, one named Ruburn. They were on a caravan from Nartok to Aulbes and beyond.

³² *Mwah! Ha! Ha!*

³³ Because you do go up a level when you keep bothering the DM! Ha! Ha!

³⁴ I'll reveal the name of the adventure later on. Although I like this adventure, it's got one of those stupid names that gives away too much... ☺

This is what Durmain tells us: *“The caravan consisted of house items and silk. Just at the outskirts of Aulbes that night, it was raining real bad. Erthorn didn’t want to go into the village so he had us camp outside Aulbes, that cheap so-and-so... The rain was really bad. We camped at the side of the road. You couldn’t see fifteen feet in front of you that’s how dark and terrible the rain was. When it was my turn for guard duty, Ruburn woke me and offered me a hot drink. This was around 4am. But I fell asleep at one point. I woke at dawn all wet and muddy. A wagon from the caravan had disappeared as well as Erthorn’s purse and Ruburn as well was nowhere to be found. I was the one who woke Erthorn and of course was accused by him and all that. So now I work here at the Inn and want nothing to do with that cheapskate merchant.”*

We all think Durmain is telling the truth. Also it is a strong possibility that Ruburn drugged Durmain and ran off with the wagon and Erthorn’s purse. So we thank him and after a nice meal, sleep a few hours. It’s near 5pm when we are ready to act. So we decide since it’s too late this day, we’d go talk with some citizens, starting with the miller. First of all he isn’t there, this Cloten. A man named Alain answers the door and though it is odd we are asking questions, I find him really rude. There are two more men inside as well. Luckily Phil has his foot in the door before Alain can tell us to come back tomorrow and shut the door. After a couple of minutes of Alain dodging questions and being rude, Phil sees a dog under some clothing and tells Niles in a weird language and me in Souragnien. That’s when it gets really interesting. Niles uses his morphogenetik ear piece³⁵ to speak with the dog, telling it he has a nice big bone for it. So as the pile of cloth begins moving, one of those huge rats we took care of last night turns out to be the dog! *[From Steve, AKA Miranda: I think we surprised the DM here because I don’t think we were supposed to find out some things until later or not at all! Go us!]³⁶* Guess what? We got into another fight with the rat and those three guys. Halfway during the fight a half man half rat comes in through a side door and attacks Phil. Well since Niles seemed to be faring fairly well [I think he was having problems with his dagger for some reason³⁷], I pulled Philippe from his predicament and took his place. Phil really got hurt during this one...³⁸ We kill one person, one flees and one surrenders. The rat man tries to flee but I’m fast and catch up. And Philippe ends it for him with a magic missile (Niles would like to add: “I missed with my crossbow; I probably would have missed an enlarged paralyzed elephant from a three feet distance last night”). Realizing that he’s a lycanthrope I use the magic short sword to chop his head off. Cloten had on him a leather armor, a magical buckler, a magic cape, a potion, a nice rapier, a short bow with 20 arrows, fifteen gold pieces and a key. It’s at this point that villagers begin arriving. They get Ghini and once we prove we are right by showing her Cloten’s rat tracks leading to his headless body, she believes us. With Ghini we search the mill. Inside we find two more men in the basement and to be safe, Niles cuts their hands to make sure they’re not lycanthropes (Niles would like to add: “Wow, you make it sounds like I cut their whole hands! I’m not evil!”³⁹). They’re not. We search the rest of the mill. We do find a hole in the floor and it’s too small for any of

³⁵ The Lamordian implant from *Raiders of the Black Ice* sessions 5 to 8.

³⁶ Steve is so right, the PCs really took a major shortcut with this one! But you know what? They earned it. There was no way I could stop this one without some bad railroading on my part. Something I refuse to do even if it messes up my plans!

³⁷ If by “problems” you mean rolling nothing higher than a 5, then yes Niles had problems. ☺

³⁸ Philippe went down to something like 2 hit points. And got hurt by the ratman... (Cue sinister music)

³⁹ Let’s all remember Miranda’s sense of humor! Ha! Ha! But yes, I will say that Niles slightly cut them to see if the wounds would heal instantly. They did not. And the PCs knew this info from their knowledge checks, which they argued came with a lot of superstitions too. It made sense to me to think that most people would think creatures of the night needed magical weapons to hurt them all the time.

us. We send Killer Kitty (*Niles' familiar*) to investigate and she finds it is safe as well as bringing us a silver armband. So we get a child to inspect the hole and he finds a chainmail, an onyx with gold on it and fifty gold. We give him five for his troubles.

We look upstairs and I think I surprised Phil by casting detect magic: mwahahahahahah! Oh well these new abilities are fun let me tell ya. Wait till I start playing with the shadows!⁴⁰ Ok there is a secretary here. We find two books on the core's geography and two on the core's history. Very, very nice finds. I also take an ink vial. Now here we also find Cloten's ledgers and discover that he has in fact been stealing from the village. And we find an entry with the name Largo and some of the profits go to him. Another entry is for Lysander with the word '*ransom?*' I think Lysander is either alive or been eaten by Cloten. The rest of the second floor has a chest. Hence the key! Inside are two hundred gold pieces, twenty-five platinum pieces and three bloodstones which we deduce for once that are worth fifty each. Usually it's more like "Hey, it's a rock!" [*Count that up to the fact that none of us are rogues and our appraising skills are all but non-existent!*] So yes Ghini thinks it's better if the money that is owed to the villagers goes there first, then we can keep the leftovers. I'm ok with that.

Well that's it for now...

⁴⁰ Miranda has multi-classed into the Shadowsworn class from *Book of Roguish Luck*.

Session Twelve – Adventure from *Dungeon #131*¹ (Played June 4th, 2008)

December 12th, 750 : Aulbes, Darkon²

After some discussion, we decide to donate the gold found in the mill to the village.³ Philippe notices three or four people looking pale faced and red eyed in the crowd gathered around the mill. He lets us know, so it's decided that Niles will talk to the sick looking people and Philippe and I go back to the Inn. Niles does speak to one of the sick people but doesn't learn much, probably just some kind of flu. At the inn there is a little festive party going on. Philippe and I get free drinks, but I don't drink so I just pretend to drink by bringing it to my lips but not sipping. Yuck! How can anyone drink such a nasty concoction! (*Funny thing is us players do drink beer hahaahhahahah! So it's ironic that Miranda doesn't drink hee hee!*⁴). Niles joins us and then goes off to speak to a couple more sick looking people inside the inn. He ends up chatting with a lady and they end up going back up to his room. I can't imagine what they'll do? Anyways nothing much goes on and Durmain thanks us and is grateful for our help because his name is cleared of any guilt that he had before since we proved Cloten was the thief. He says that if he ever can help us to let him know!

During the evening, I seem to have an epiphany or something because I actually tell a great tale about life in Paridon and the gangs there I belonged to before I became a monk. The crowd ate it up like! They were like putty in my hands! Maybe I have a future as a public speaker? Na. I did have a few men try to get me to drink and join them at their tables but I refused gently, I doubt we have anything in common and I have no interest whatsoever in any type of relationship at this time of my life. That's not to say I might not get interested in a man later on⁵, but for now, nope.⁶

Detect Poison and *Detect Magic* spells are cast subtly on the sick people at the inn but reveal nothing.⁷

¹ I'll reveal the name of the adventure later on. Although I like this adventure, it's got one of those stupid names that gives away too much... ☺

² The Improv Session! I actually forgot to bring my *Dungeon* mag because I seemed to recall the adventure was over. Doh! (It had been about a month and a half between games instead of our usual two to three weeks.) So quite a bit of this session came from improvising and memory of things to come. At least, the characters had the map. The major event was done (Cloten the Wererat), even if they started with it. (I blame a pretty stressful day with a job interview a couple of hours prior to the game.)

³ Since it was most likely stolen from the villagers by Cloten in the first place.

⁴ Except for me the DM: I just cannot drink and be a DM. I have zero tolerance to alcohol...

⁵ Personally, I think she should date Baron Aulbesmil... ☺

⁶ As I read this I am struck by the fact that Miranda seems much more polite and thoughtful than at the beginning of the game. (And please take note that the exact opposite could be said about Philippe whose blue blood seems to come out a bit more as he keeps antagonizing all authority figures around him. Maybe he misses Souragne? I know that Souragne misses him...)

⁷ The PCs wonder about poison being involved here because of their adventure in Thistle (one of the villages belonging to Lord Aulbesmil). Some Goblins were poisoning the small village. And this is where they found the Maison de l'Anneau's journal in the depot. (Sessions 2 to 5)

Ghini thinks us looking for the still missing Lysander at the hunting lodge the next day would be a good idea. We do too. Who wants to search for some cranky bear in the forests anyways? Philippe keeps looking at a young woman named “Mary” for some reason. Apparently she’s been in the village since the people started being sick. That would be a week and a half. Odd indeed. I bet there’s something about Mary...⁸ Philippe remembers seeing her at the mill and everyone seemed happy except for her. She seemed startled and left. So we head off to bed. Apparently some people didn’t sleep.

In the morning, Philippe and I rise at a reasonable hour and seeing as Niles is still sleeping, we head down for breakfast. Durmain is sleeping too I guess. Then we hear a ruckus in the kitchen and going in we find a man on the floor surrounded by pots and pans fallen all over! His elbow is bleeding. By pulling up his sleeve we discover some nasty scabs and gross puss. I think that I’m glad I didn’t have breakfast yet, cause I might have lost it on the poor fella.⁹ Niles hears us below and comes down. I take the opportunity to go to the Temple and get Father Martin. He has us bring the man to the Temple¹⁰. I get blood all over my hands. If I get sick, Aulbesmil is so taking care of me!¹¹ So Martin seems a little green to our liking cause he can’t get rid of the disease but does seem to relieve some of the pain this guy is in. Seeing as we can’t do anything more, we head back to the inn. Niles goes to study his spells while Philippe and I read the book we found in the warehouse way back when. We get some more pages decrypted from the coded Draconic while Niles studies his spells.

Excerpts from the Maison de l’Anneau’s journal

726. (roughly 10 pages)

- *March ... We have found an ambitious young noble by the name of Joaquim Aulbesmil in Nartok. We can use him as a go-between for various errands...*
- *May ... His uncle, Wolfgang Aulbesmil, is baron of Nartok: I feel like there might be some things our up and coming Aulbesmil might not like doing, especially if it tarnishes the family name... Yes, he does seem to possess strong convictions, a strong character.*
- *December ... We have sent Aulbesmil to Martira Bay. The Requiem will be performed in Karg this year but there are rumours of Kargat activity in Martira Bay ... Yet his orders are clear ...*

727. (roughly 10 pages)

- *February 1st ... Aulbesmil came back ... Almost to our surprise. He managed to kill a nest of ghouls around Martira Bay. He is even more efficient than we thought... Him and some swords-for-hire he found... But we still wonder, where did so many ghouls come from???*

⁸ I really can’t believe you threw that in!? ☺ Funny!

⁹ Miranda is always so compassionate.

¹⁰ I think it’s cute how no one asked what kind of temple it was...

¹¹ See? She does want Aulbesmil in her life... ☺

- April 3rd... Abdel shares with us the holy ritual of the Vishap (of the Great Wyrms), a ritual of Set to channel the knowledge of Dragons, to become a Mojh... We discuss whether or not one of us should follow through with this...

729. (10 pages)

- A woman Vistani named Gabrielle Aderre kills Bakholis, replaces him as Lord of Invidia, the Watchers in Shadow grant her powers accordingly...

730. (10 pages)

- The land of Verbrek forms...
- September 15th ... The Kargat is getting closer to us, I think... Their activity in Thistle's vicinity has been increasing in the last months...
- November 8th ... I fear a Kargat undead attack soon... The Fathers of the Fraternity do not seem to be on to us so far... I have made plans that Aulbesmil come here and burn our compound if ever we need to make haste and escape from here...
- December 21st ... and I tell my newfound partners about the Wolf God and his teachings how they can help us...
- December 28th... Is it because of our newfound faith in the Wolf God? What set him off? ... John has decided to follow the path of the Mojh while we were gone for a few days... He performed the ritual...

Niles has time to identify the items found on Cloten and discovers that the buckler is magical (+I) and is engraved with an insignia of the Maison de l'Anneau on it. The cape is a *cape of weaponry* and the potion is one of *cat's grace*.

The word MOHJ comes up in the journal we read. Apparently it has something to do with dragons. "State of being a dragon... dragon and knowledge intertwined together..." is what the guys think. It's one of those words you can't really translate, that there is no equivalent for in another language... Beats me, I don't read that particular language... **YET!!!!** I Love languages! Ha! Ha! Once all the identifying and reading are done, we leave for the lodge and, hopefully, to find Lysander. We travel a bit and finally arrive after an hour and a half. When we're about fifty feet away from the lodge, Niles casts *detect thoughts* and finds three people inside the lodge. Um so yeah like we're really paying attention, he hears the thought of a man in a tree right near us. The man, we realize, is a Caliban¹² and shoots an arrow at us. Philippe casts an entangle spell to immobilize him which works, but his mouth isn't immobilized so he yells to the guys in the cabin. A battle ensues yet again. We are up against two Calibans inside the cabin. I almost bit the dust but thanks to a wonderful potion I had, I live! I wonder if there'll ever be a time that we don't have a battle every day?¹³ And please it better not be only when it snows like crazy! So Lysander seems impressed with us. I guess he doesn't get out much. We search the lodge and find 14 gold, some bows and arrows an axe and a falchion. Lysander tells us Cloten came by before and we tell him he is dead. The three Calibans

¹² As a general note, Calibans are slightly different in my campaign. I LOVE the concept, but I just don't buy that they need to be stupid or simple... IMHO.

¹³ I think Miranda is being overly dramatic... ☺

seem to have been mercenaries hired by Cloten. We leave the lodge and it takes us two hours instead of one and a half as Lysander is pretty beat up. It's around two in the afternoon when we get back to Aulbes. Durmain is back at the inn. Ghini seems glad to see Lysander but as we've never got along I doubt she'll ever like us. It probably has something to do with the fact that we seem to be doing her job, and Philippe keeps reminding her about it!¹⁴ Good one, Phil! So she says we should go investigate the bear area and the den next. So she can stay in Aulbes and sit on her ass? Yeah I guess we are doing her job. Aulbesmil should rethink his employees. Anyways, Lysander gets healed and is better off than we initially thought.

Back at the Temple, two more cases of this strange disease have been added and now I think it's time to alert the Lord. I decide to study the Lamordian book on human biology and find nothing that helps me. Ghini goes to verify something. (Like how rich she's becoming by us doing her job!). Philippe and Niles discover that Mary cleans houses for a living. A different one each day. And the houses she's been cleaning are where the people get sick afterwards. So the guys go to some old guy Alexis' place to question Mary while I am still reading the book. Mary is there. Alexis is sleeping. He lost his wife a few months ago. It's discovered that Mary used to clean a John Ap neblu's house a few miles from here! Coincidences like that I don't believe in. Mary is very suspect in my eyes and I think it's time to find out what she knows! Ap Neblu's house is two days from here! I think we can say that the bear can wait. I hope he can "bear" being without us a little longer. Ok so that's all for now! Talk to you soon...

Session Thirteen – Adventure from *Dungeon #131 - The Beasts of Aulbesmil / House of Ap Neblu*

(Played early July, 2008 – I forgot the exact date)

December 13th, 750

We decide to investigate the sickness in the village of Aulbes. We discover through questioning several villagers that, in fact, roughly seventy-five years ago a sickness called the Crimson Death threatened Darkon for a few months, killing many people. It affects the groin, elbow and knees of the victims and painfully bleeds them through purulent sores. Twenty percent of the population perished as a result of the Crimson Death outbreak. Back then, King Azalin Rex put people in quarantine. Anyone who defied the quarantine was executed. The curfew lasted thirty years. I think that the King made it last that long to control the population because the sickness only lasted a few months. *It's good to be the King.*¹⁵

We decide we want to send a message to baron Aulbesmil. In the evening, Niles spends his time with the town's cleric. I suppose that's more constructive than spending his time horizontally, eh? He lets us know that the cleric seems more talented in the art of healing than as a priest. Philippe and I spend another evening at the inn trying to get new

¹⁴ See what I mean about Philippe's *pleasant* disposition?

¹⁵ Steve – Miranda's player: *Reference from History of the World Part 1, a Mel Brooks film.*

information. If we don't try we may not get any information at all! The villagers are concerned about the sickness; That much is obvious. We get treated again by the people, but I choose not to savor any alcohol as usual. Rather keep a lucid mind. We do speak to Mary once again about John Ap Neblu and the Crimson Death. We discover he has a rather extensive collection of books in his home. *I bet I'd find some really interesting books in his library! Especially language books! Now there's a home I have to go to and see its library!* He never did mention to her the Crimson Death. He did do lots of research. Apparently he became ill two months ago and she took care of him. She says he looked like a lizard man once he became sick? Like a *magical veil* was lifted. What the hell is a lizard man? I think in Paridon I've heard of these lizard men, but can't be one hundred percent positive. She was scared at first, but since he apparently always treated her kindly, she stayed to care for him. She also assumed he was a Caliban under a magical disguise... He did get better. He left three to four weeks ago, which coincides with our finding him after the bizarre snowstorm that landed us in Lamordia (*DM stalling us from our destination IMO! Patrick :P~*)¹⁶

Hey, when Mary mentioned the library, Philippe and I looked at each other thinking the exact same thing. We knew we had to go to Ap Neblu's home and have a look at his books! If Niles had been with us, his reaction would have been the same as ours. Mary tells us Ap Neblu didn't have many visitors while she worked for him. A beautiful woman did visit him and Mary seems to recall the name: Nathalie, maybe? The woman was in another room at the time, but Mary tells us her and John argued and then the woman left as fast as she arrived. I'll get back to Nathalie later. We retire for the evening after that.

December 14th, 750

As we wake, we learn that there are three more sick people. We decide to go to Ap Neblu's home. As Aulbesmil's home is on the way, we decide that, instead of paying some poor sap gold, we'd go see Joachim personally to tell him how good a job Ghini is doing and as well, what is going on in the village. Since we already have two horses, we ask Ghini for a third one to travel to Nartok and her employer's home. She gives us a speech about how the horse is taxing the village's economy? Excuse me, but I think that Ghini should perhaps go back to ant farming, she seems very apt at it. Much better than how she takes care of the village. We are really doing her job so well. So after listening to Ghini's boring speech, we depart for Nartok and Joachim's home. Near 4:00pm, we arrive in the city and head straight for the baron's home. We get passed through quickly and get an audience. We tell him of the events in the village. He confirms that back in 688 and 689, from fall to spring, the Crimson Death ravaged Darkon. It began in the Boglands and spread all through Darkon. He mentions the curfew as well. He doesn't seem to be as jumpy as he was the last time we saw him, and for some reason that pleases me. Bah! So er, yeah, um, we ask him to send a qualified priest or cleric to Aulbes plus he might be able to send Silas Armand, the Alchemist. Joachim does offer us twenty gold each, to

¹⁶ Well, I've never been so insulted! © Did it really feel like stalling?!?!? They befriended George Weathermay, the W-Foxgrove twins, Balfour de Castille, Imron Gauthfallow and John Ap Neblu (momentarily – befriend might be a strong word in Ap Neblu's case) !?!?

which the guys accept. I simply say I'll take it at a later date. We then head for Ap Neblu's place.

While on our way, we are attacked by wolves. We beat three while two are out under spells by Philippe. Ten more appear and chase us. I found that really odd. Niles uses his freaky ear piece to converse with them but all he learns is we're their next meal. Sounds promising! So the wolves pretty much catch up to us, but then two men on black horses show up! They help scare away the wolves with firearms and eight huge dogs! One man has red hair and the other one, upon further inspection is very familiar! It's George Weathermay from that freak snowstorm. The man with George is Lorant Sarkazy by the way. George tells us there's been an augmentation of lycanthropes in Darkon of late. Silver, magical weapons and wolfsbane are effective against lycans he tells us. Lorant tells us about Owlbears, Shadow Fey, Lycanthropes and wolves being more active in Darkon now. We begin thinking, after we've met George and this Nathalie I said I'd come back to, well make her name Natalia and we've Ap Neblu's woman friend. The one who almost gave George's niece lycanthropy. Small world indeed! We agree to wait for George at Ap Neblu's home in two days.

We part ways and, not far after, we make camp. Tired, we sleep. I dream of Forfar and some solar eclipse. It's the spring equinox. Man, why do I have these freaky dreams???? And Goblins who pursue humans. Led by some Druids? That's really bizarre if you ask me. A woman gave birth to a boy of the Ap Neblu/Ap Morten line. She dies while giving birth... Flash forward to the same boy at sixteen years old and having been raised by Druids. He tries to rally the Druids, get them to leave their gods forsaken land. Him and his pals attack Castle Tristenoria and fail miserably, all of them dying horrible deaths at the hands of undead horrors. Ap Neblu, somehow, just comes back to life! One minute he was lying dead and the next his wounds are healed and he lives! He also understands that there are powers within the Shadows of the World, the *Watchers in Shadows*, who control the ghosts' destinies in the castle, play with their (un)lives. When I wake, Niles also wakes up and realizes he is holding John Ap Neblu's book on his chest! He never took it out! Niles also had the same dream as me! Okay, er yes, um, I swear I didn't eat anything funny before I went to bed.

December 15th, 750

It's a quiet day. Anyways, we move on to Ap Neblu's home. NO wolves on our route. Yay no battles for once! At 4:30 PM, near sundown, we come upon Ap Neblu's home. I cast *Detect Creature* on reptilian creatures but learn nothing. We move up to the house having listened and looked around. Nothing is heard or seen. I try one of my new abilities and unlock the door so we enter quietly, or so we think. It's humid inside. It's a large coatroom/vestibule. We hear voices through the only door leading into the house. Well that's it for now, I'll catch you on the flip side...

Session Fourteen – *House of Ap Neblu (con't)*

(Played August 27th, 2008)

December 15th, 750, around 5:00pm, somewhere near the Darkon

So I cast a spell, which can detect a specific type of creatures. I chose it to be the lizard type. Sure enough I detect three lizard presences on the other side of the door and their aura is of moderate intensity. That kind of means we're not going to have an easy time of it. When do we ever? One creature is off to the side, and two are directly in front of us but together. Niles uses the wand of stone shape to basically remove the stone around the locked door so it opens with ease. Did I mention the door is locked? I did now, heh. So the door is open so I tumble in, away from the three lizardmen. The guys get to shoot freely with their crossbows and bows at the beasties. Well, after a few rounds, we defeat the lizardmen and look around. **[Hey I have the map for once, so I can actually visualize the place now! Usually it's Patrice (Niles) who keeps the maps]** It's a living room with some tables, chairs and bookcases.

The tables have books on them: Gazetteers and history books from all over our land. I really like this place!¹⁷ Books are always good for you and there's nothing wrong with learning new things. Reading broadens your mind. My teachers taught me that back at the monastery in Paridon. Oh well, I guess it must have sunk in a little because right now I am absolutely fascinated with all the books we find. I might need to find some type of magical device to store the books we find, because you know me, I'll take'em all!

Once the living room is done, we move onto the next room, which has a nice sofa, wooden floor and carpets. There's also a desk and more bookcases. There are books on geography, history and biology. The biology ones don't resemble the one I found in Lamordia. After we look at this room, we come upon another which when we open the door lights itself. By that, I mean there are torches or whatever on the wall and they light up when the door opens and we enter. First thing we see on the floor is a sigil of the Maison de l'Anneau. After that at the far end of the room is an altar with some kind of serpent on it. It's not that big, but not small either. Of course Niles just walks through the sigil and of course, feels weaker from doing that. I personally would have walked around the sigil. Oh well, you can't win'em all... The snake comes to life when Niles goes to the altar but we end up defeating it. Philippe finds a book on the religion of Set. The book contains rituals, history and canon material. **[Miranda will have to shag Aulbesmil big time so she can get a nice bag of holding hahahahaah! So many books not enough place to put them. Mean, mean, mean DM!!!!!!]**¹⁸

After this room we come upon a kitchen and what looks like the place where Mary slept. There's a bed. And a blast from our past! We meet up with our friendly neighborhood pygmies!¹⁹ Damn those little pests! This time we were more successful and defeated

¹⁷ I love the fact that they're breaking into this place and Miranda is having the time of her life(!).

¹⁸ Be careful what you wish for...

¹⁹ They are Muckdwellers from Dungeon no 130 *Within the Circle*. They are "cutesy" lizard thingies.

them all without really taking any serious damage. Last time, if it hadn't been for Killer Kitty²⁰, we'd have been toast. So in the new room, after we defeat the pygmies we find a desk with a hidden compartment and inside it are scrolls with spells! Some I even understand. Shhhhhhhhh!!!! Don't tell the guys. I feel that Philippe is suspicious of me casting spells now²¹. The more the merrier I say. The list of spells²² is:

- i. Simple spells:
 1. 1st level - Guilt, Proficiency
 2. 2nd level – Plunge Deep to the Core,
 3. 3rd level - Dragonskin
- ii. Complex spells:
 1. 1st level - Illuminated Weapon
 2. 2nd level - Shrapnel Globe, Wild Stealth
 3. 3rd level – Extended Charge
- iii. Exotic spells:
 1. 1st level - Anavar's Anticipated Attack
 2. 2nd level – Detoim Nar (Guided Strike),
 3. 3rd level – Will of the Gods

There are also gazetteers on Dragons, Giants and Set. I take a few books. Well what can I do, I'm addicted to knowledge! Plus, later on I'll have one mean library! We take turns doing watch. I read a bit about Barovia's history. Apparently their ruler is sometimes called the DEVIL or something like that. Sounds kinda creepy, if you ask me. Read some about the Crimson Death and how Falkovnia tried to invade Darkon, but with no success at all. I think they tried more than once and have never really succeeded. If at first you don't succeed isn't a motto known to all Falkovnians or something like that.

Niles finds more pygmies and we beat them into the ground like the scum they are. Where the heck are they coming from? Ap Neblu keeps really bizarre buddies. Then again he's part lizardman or whatever²³ so what can ya expect from that, eh? Ok so for now I'm beat and am going to go rest. We'll wait here for the two days to meet up with George what's-is-name and his buddy whose name escapes me right now²⁴. Happy trails and all that and until next time!

²⁰ Niles' cat familiar

²¹ Somehow, I get the feeling Philippe is getting suspicious of a few people...

²² These spells are taken from *Grimoire II* by Malhavoc Press. Your class dictates which class of spells you may cast. Any spellcaster may cast simple spells. (Simply put, this distinction in levels comes from the fact some spells are better than others within the same level range: e.g. Magic Missile Vs Tenser's Floating Disc.)

²³ He is a Mojh to be more precise (*Arcana Unearthed / Evolved* from Malhavoc Press)

²⁴ George Weathermay and his ally Lorant Sarkazy a gamekeeper of the forests around Nartok.

Session Fifteen – *House of Ap Neblu (con't): Of a Dream, a Death and of the Past...*

(Played October 8th, 2008)

December 16th, 750: John ApNeblu's house, Darkon

Miranda Cornelius

In association with I Ate My Shadow Productions

And the collaboration of What Are You Wearing Incorporated

Is proud to present:

NILES AND MIRANDA'S MOST BOGUS ADVENTURE.

(Philippe was the tall, silent and mysterious type during this episode.)²⁵

Philippe has first watch duty as we rest in what seems like ApNeblu's bedchamber. So Niles and I sleep. Suddenly, both Niles and I wake with a start. Philippe isn't there. I think we slept something like two hours. We begin by searching for him through the house: The kitchen, then the library. When we peek in the Chapel of Set, the torches on the walls light up, but this time they're black? Yet they still light up the chapel somewhat so we can still see. Bizarre. We end up in the library, and lil ole me, being such a bookworm, spy a book on a table with the title *The Revolt of Nartok*.

Of course, being me, I just have to touch it and try to open it and see. I hardly touch it and then this gust of wind takes up and blows the pages and other things in the room. And this creepy black fog surrounds us. I stop touching the book, yet the wind stays but not as strong. Niles and I discuss this and I decide to borrow his dagger to flip the book's heavy cover and turn its pages (It was one of the few books left untouched by the wind. That's when the wind really picked up and the black fog became even creepier. I see the title of a chapter inside, *The fall of House Stross*, before the wind and creepy fog suddenly stop.

Suddenly we find ourselves outside in a courtyard. (It took us fifteen minutes to figure out where we were, and all we saw was um... three rocks and a tree, eh Patrick? Joel will concur on this point even though he was absent :P~)²⁶

²⁵ Despite the light tone of the title this was one of our best and probably most serious sessions.

²⁶ Here we have the Peanut gallery acting up again because of my mapping (in)ability... ☺

A black wind rushes around you, dousing lights, darkening the room, and chilling you under your clothes. The air seems suddenly damp, and you can't see as well as a moment ago: all the color seems drained out of the room around you. Many windows in the castle's hall are lit and you hear a group of men singing near the castle gate. The time is night, and the singers are off-key and probably drunk.²⁷

We see a seventy-foot tall oak so big that if it was a sunny day, we'd not know it. There are also two smaller buildings, shrines with stained glass on each one. One is to the goddess Saint Flora, the Harvest Goddess (probably a benevolent goddess). The other shrine is to the Hunter God St Hubertus (a deity less involved in the affairs of man). (We affectionately called it St Beloeilus.)²⁸ These two gods are related to the Forfarian pantheon, but were worshipped nearly seventy years ago in Southern Darkon.

The courtyard is full of fallen leaves, many years of them heaped in moldering piles. Moss covers the shaded southern wall, and the windows are too dirty to see through. Two of the buildings here are clearly small shrines, with stained glass windows and carvings of the gods and saints over their doors. An enormous oak tree dominates the center of the courtyard, standing at least 70 feet tall and shading the entire area. The bark is old and gnarled, the leaves are dark and sickly, and the lower branches were hacked off years ago, but the tree seems alive.

A man in a red robe adorned with black appears through a doorway. (Oh before I forget, people are singing but really badly from somewhere within this castle, like they are drunk. Don't quit your day jobs, people.) This man speaks down to a guard and the guard leaves as if the man had kicked him in the you-know-what. Then the robed man passes through the entrance and takes out a piece of paper. He speaks some arcane words and a light appears in his hand. Must have cast a light spell. Doesn't take a genius to figure that out, heh. That's also when the singing stops. Thank the gods!²⁹

Another man wearing a black cloak appears through another entrance on the other side. He has a scimitar at his hip and is holding something, a scroll or perhaps a wand. By the way, the two men haven't noticed Niles or I yet. Ya think they need their eyes examined or what? Don't bother, the truth is too messed up for me. So we also overhear the black-cloaked man speak a few words, some incantation of some kind (he has some strange, upper class yet formal accent), and then sneaks up on the robed man. The loud drunken singing starts up again. We yell to warn him! The cloaked man's shadow turns and looks at us? Ok this is definitely beginning to make me wonder. Wish I knew more about arcane stuff like Niles & Philippe do.

²⁷ The following excerpts are from Wolfgang Baur's Open Design 2 adventure (which shall remain nameless because the title gives a *small* clue as to the nature of the castle – yes I am a little paranoid as a DM when it comes to adventure names, very often I'll tell the players what adventure they played after the fact). They have been *slightly* adapted to the PCs surroundings, but it is very much the same as the original.

²⁸ I live in Beloeil, close to St-Hubert and Montréal's South Shore.

²⁹ And I thought Paridoners did not believe in Gods? ☺

The young man in his black cloak slithers right up to the red-cloaked man and stabs him with a curved sword. The man never saw it coming. Now blood bubbles on his lips. As he turns to defend himself, a clawed chunk of darkness reaches up from the ground and tears at his robe; the victim seems stunned and slack-jawed. The young man pulls out a dagger to finish him off.

Anyways, the cloaked man attacks the robed man, and I rush to his aid, but I can't seem to touch him. Niles does harm him with a magic missile but it only seems to make the man weak? I am unsure about that part so ask Niles. So the cloaked man kills the robed man.³⁰ The robed man hit his assailant with a stronger magic missile, but was felled right after. Inflicting a coup de grace, we can see the man's Shadow watching out for more trouble!

The man in his red and black robe falls to the ground, and his last breath rattles from his throat. You hear a deep dwarven voice say, "Well done lad, you've avenged your family. Blood for blood is the best way. You can take your castle away from them as well. I'll tell you how."

The man dressed in black lifts his head and gives a grim smile before he turns to face a dwarf. "Tell me everything," he says. Then the shadows flicker around you and the wind howls through the towers and the tree branches. You close your eyes against the dust and swirling leaves. When you open them again, you are in the courtyard. The wizard's body is gone, and so are the young man and the snow-bearded dwarf.³¹

Then the wind blows and the creepy fog comes back. We are now in the same place, but it is deserted. Niles or I seem to remember the Nartok Revolt took place nearly seventy years ago. The Stross family owned Castle Stross before the revolt.³² They were also adepts of magic. Caliban silver miners from nearby sometimes use it. There are also some dwarves nearby. From what we remember, the Revolt was really nasty. The people won the day and stormed the castle. The whole Stross family was hung, no matter what age or sex. There was also some kind of stand at or near the Oros bridge involving the paladins of the Order of the Undying Light.

The wind blows yet again. Bah! This is getting really confusing! We now seem to be in Paridon's countryside. Wait a minute!?! There hasn't been a countryside in Paridon for a few years now. This is so weird! Apparently we are outside of Niles' village, which, of course as I previously mentioned, doesn't EXIST anymore. From behind us, we hear a

³⁰ Actually, during the fight, Niles first hit him with a Magic Missile and then realized that by concentrating they could physically hurt the man by hitting with their bare hands. Niles understood they were like shades in the past...

³¹ This is what I read them, from the most excellent Open Design 2 adventure by Wolfgang Baur. It is a very Ravenloft-y adventure. It is also part of some longer term foreshadowing...

³² My history of Nartok is obviously different from RL's canon. It is intertwined with Zobeck's (Open Design's default setting). The Stross were the rulers of Nartok for some 600 years. They paid tribute to Azalin Rex but the king let them have some latitude as to what they did. Even though the city was "freed" during the Revolt, there are still dues to be paid to Azalin. Some wonder why the king lets this city get away with some things...

man's voice. He speaks in Zherisian with a strange accent: "Finally. You've arrived." We turn around. And see a man from Forlorn? Hey! We realize it's John ApNeblu! What in the? Is his Forfarian face an illusion or is it real?³³ John is roughly thirty years old. So I happen to look at Niles and he is a different person under some kind of veil or illusion? John invites us to his campfire and we accept. He tells us he's found a child. This child is bad news. He compares it to a Dukkar? What the heck is a Dukkar? Apparently this mythical creature is bad news. He goes on to explain that to recognize the child, it'll probably have a distinguishing birthmark. Thanks for the info?

That's when he tells us the child needs to be taken care of: As in killed, terminated, dead, no more living. So as we talk some more, I figure out Niles is in actuality Largo. Hey! Largo is mentioned in the logs we found in Aulbes.³⁴ We also realize that I'm Henry Amber. The same dude who got offed by Peck, the Swan Street Slicer, back in Paridon.³⁵ Back when Niles, Philippe and I first started out together. Holy Moly! Okay so this is really like ****ed up!

So ApNeblu believes it might be best if the child was killed. This is where it gets totally surreal! Niles says he'll do it! From our discussion, ApNeblu states that he will not kill a child, but that doesn't mean he'll not kill anyone else!³⁶ My answer is I'll not kill a child. Personally speaking, I'll never lay a hand on a child. Killing is so wrong. Perhaps killing this child was necessary, but I'd not do it.³⁷ John also told us that there were two births very recently and one of those children must be the one. So Niles tells us he'll do it alone. I am pretty much showing a straight face, but man o man am I freaking!³⁸

Niles returns. John asks him if it's done. Niles says without hesitation: "YES!" I am like really confused. John is satisfied and asks us: "Same place and time next year?" Of course we say yes, being absolutely clueless about what is going on. Once he is gone, I ask Niles if he did it. "No" is his answer. Boy was I relieved! If you think about it, of course he'd not do it! But he did his job in tricking ApNeblu. I am beginning to think we both did. Well don't take this the wrong way or think me daft! Traveling back and seeing events that already happened. Now that I think about it, I think I'm right. But wait, that's not all! More is to come! So I deduce that this Fraternity meets once a year. Hmmm. Oh, and Niles wasn't feeling well and threw up after that.³⁹

³³ They met John once. And it was long after he became a Mojh (from *Arcana Unearthed / Evolved* by Malhavoc Press).

³⁴ Cloten, the miller / wererat, was giving parts of his profit as a thief to a Largo.

³⁵ If I remember correctly, Niles made an intelligence check to remember that name from the list of victims.

³⁶ ApNeblu had some major issues with killing a child, even one who MIGHT be a harbinger of destruction. I don't think I said he'd kill anybody else gladly... With all these things happening with the Maison de l'Anneau and the FoS, the players really don't know what to make of these guys, but they are certain they are up to no good. Mwah! Ha! Ha!

³⁷ That's the part where I said it was unfortunate Philippe was not with them, they could have dressed up the child as a Goblyn and then he wouldn't have had any problems killing him! (Reference to one of the earlier adventures where Philippe killed a slew of baby goblins and their sitter.)

³⁸ There was some really amazing role-playing going on here. While Miranda wasn't sure if any of this was real, an illusion or they were really affecting the past Niles just blurted out that he would do it! Alone.

³⁹ Niles seems to have failed *some kind* of check... Hum...

Niles concentrates on the situation we're in. So he thinks I have an affinity with shadows. Ya think? (Miranda is now a Shadowsworn 1st level. It's a class found in the *Book of Roguish Luck* by Malhavoc Press. We just don't/didn't know how she became one until this evening!) So Niles concentrates on his memory or something.⁴⁰ I concentrate on the shadows and how to manipulate them? Guess what? It works! The wind blows and the creepy black fog returns. The leaves and sand blow in our face and presto, magic, we are now in Aulbes. We're in the mill. By looking out a window, we surmise we are at the time right after the three of us had our battle there. We hear voices outside. Niles tries to see from the window upstairs but can't see anyone. We do search the mill again but find nothing new.

So feeling kind of lucky we decide to open the front door. Lo and behold we see ApNeblu (as a Mojh), Balfour de Casteelle, Largo (a few years older) and Imron Gauthfallow (who was apparently brought here by the Maison de l'Anneau in a manner similar to us??? Through windy shadows???). What are they doing here? From inside, it appeared to be an argument. Um, the really freaky part is they are talking about me. Er yeah, me. Apparently I'm honorable and a good judge of character. Now that raises the question as to why? Soon enough Niles and I find out. Balfour says he has confidence in me (he did seem nice back in Lamordia during that mystical snowstorm). Back to the why: Largo and ApNeblu cast some kind of incantation together. We then see an image of me sleeping at the inn in Aulbes, just a few houses away (some kind of Scrying??). A Shadow hovers around my sleeping form, and then does something really insane! It enters my body! Through my ears, nostrils and mouth! Gah! Am I glad I was sleeping when the Shadow did that! So, um, why'd they do that to me? The four men disperse into the shadows? As they do I swear I hear "We can have confidence." I'm seriously worried now. Why me?⁴¹

Then Niles and I wake up. He asks me if I had the same dream he did. Without even asking about his dream I say yes I did. That was too messed up to be a coincidence! So we have a lot to discuss with Philippe! I'll talk to you later!

(Okay for all of you reading this. Patrick had a whole game prepared for the three of us. Since Joël couldn't make it, he had to completely change his game plan at the last minute! Let me be the first to congratulate him on a job well done! C'était écoeurant Patrick! Merci beaucoup!)⁴² (Joël tu as manqué de quoi, mon pote!)

⁴⁰ Niles has taken a level in the Akashic class (again from *Arcana Unearthed / Evolved*). It's a really neat class (even if a little underpowered) who can tap into something called the world's Collective Memory. I really like what this can mean in a world like RL. Right now, this means he can access this a few times a day to get a +3 bonus to any skill.

⁴¹ And THAT'S HOW Miranda got her Shadowsworn abilities... It came back to her as some kind of repressed memory. It was neat to see Steve the player excited about this and Miranda the character worried a little...

⁴² Most of this was planned in my head. I just hadn't had a chance to show it to them yet (some chronic shoulder pains have really slowed down my ability to write in the last year). But it's not over! There is more to come! And the amazing thing is that a lot of the PCs' actions sparked new ideas for me too! And

Session Sixteen – *House of ApNeblu (con't): Where our heroes have a long discussion...*

(Played around November 15th, 2008)

Duly dubbed : The Dirty Rotten Dog Episode (A.K.A - Chien Sale , eh Philippe? :P~)

December 16th, 750 ApNeblu's place near Aulbes.

Little note: from now on I'll be putting my own little comments, but in red, so as not to offset Patrick's blue ones ;) (Steve aka Miranda)

In this episode Miranda doesn't really do much as Philippe and Niles spend most of the session speaking with John ApNeblu. It took quite a while for Miranda to actually calm down as John refused to answer her queries. She does end up asking a question or two, but prefers to leave the questions to the two scholars of the party.

Niles and I tell Philippe about our dreams. He takes it all in stride but I think he thought we were pretty busy and he may have missed something. We decide to stay until George Weathermay shows up for our appointed rendez-vous. I'm in the living room reading (What else would I do when I'm in a house full of books?), Philippe is in the passage from the living room to the library and Niles is in the library preparing his spells.

Philippe begins hearing noises through the wall behind him and lets us know via handsigns. We hear a voice in our heads in some language I don't understand, but that the guys seem to. I'm unsure of the language but I have my suspicions it may be the language they use when they cast spells.⁴³

So Niles uses that wand that we got from the crazy old bitch in Paridon a couple of months ago. He fashions us a door and we go through it. There we discover a, well, um flying lizard? It's about the size of a big dog. *I'm ruling Miranda has no idea what a Dragon is, though the two men might have an idea. This is Ravenloft, not another setting where Dragons are more common ;)* So this is what was talking to us in our heads? I thought it was ApNeblu as did the others, I think. So we follow it through an unexplored region of the house. At first, the thing was leading us on a wild goose chase, even tried to have us fall into a pit trap (!) but I guess in the end it got fed up of playing us for chumps and finally brought us to ApNeblu.

He's in a room with strange runes on the floor. He is wearing a robe of some kind and then I see his (its?) face: Snakeskin, hairless, eyes with vertical pupils like a snake, sharp

brought into focus some stuff I wanted to do but wasn't sure how to or exactly where I should go with it. It really was a great interactive session!

⁴³ The character who could understand were hearing a haughty voice telling them to hurry up and get there already!

teeth with some saliva (or is it venom?) and then his forked-tongue slits out. He stands beside a bookcase while taking some books out. Without looking up he says “Welcome Lord Aulbesmil. Please forgive my friend Vyrmu’s attitude.” And the lil creature flies beside Snake-man. To which I respond “What did you do to me in Aulbes?” My tone of voice suggests I am not inviting him to the ball. He appears caught off-guard as if he was really expecting Aulbesmil and even perplexed that he is not present. While asking questions, he reveals that he was aware of our presence through the Maison de l’Anneau’s ring, the one Aulbesmil shared with us.⁴⁴ And thus I move in to attack him and get in a good shot. I think I took the guys by surprise because I was really in a bad mood! So then he casts this spell with takes life from me to give him back the damage I had done to him. Then he drew a wand and arcane energies made it near impossible to move towards him at all.⁴⁵

All I want is an answer to my question. He still won’t give it to me. So the boys and he start to talk about the Fraternity of Shadows, “...*scholars wasting time bickering and theorizing about the world instead of actually doing something worthwhile...*”, King Azalin, “...*you can tell his experiments about going back to his world will only bring misery and destruction to his nation...*” and of course the prophesy of this Dukkar copy “...*which will bring upon us an era of ultimate darkness...*”. He calls it a “...*Ruinchild, a Herald of Annihilation ... as I’ve managed to translate it from Ancient Draconic...*” Then we decide to surprise him by revealing our dreams to him, we tell him about the events he participated in some forty odd years ago that we couldn’t have been at: His trying to kill some baby who supposedly was this Ruinchild back in Zherisia’s countryside. This finally gets his attention. And he really does not understand why this would happen to us! Little thing here, he seems to be really interested in doing in Azalin and he would even take his place! (Pretty ambitious these Maison de l’Anneau’s people!) He mentions to us that the Rex of Darkon is some Outlander from a world called Oerth(!). We’ve all heard those strange stories about strangers from foreign worlds, but I don’t know if I believe any of them...

So Niles finally reveals that the child isn’t dead after all to which John gets really mad and upset! Um we find out that the child is in actuality Niles’ elder brother!⁴⁶ Hmm methinks Niles has been hiding things from us, eh Philippe?⁴⁷ So yeah, Niles informs us that the birthmark on this so-called Ruinchild is in the shape of a key. So we discuss the dreams in details with ApNebly. And he is really surprised to say the least. I finally get my answer as to what he put inside me; He tells me it is something called the ritual of the *Ultima Umbremensch*. John and his buddies called on an entity from somewhere on a plane of Shadow...

Apparently he offers to be our mentor and to help us. The guys understand more than I do. We do end up asking about Natalia Vhorishkova but he has nothing concrete to offer.

⁴⁴ The Sorcerer’s ring that Philippe wears.

⁴⁵ A wand of *Drain Away Speed* from *Arcana Evolved*. I like that it does no damage but slows the target down considerably. It makes even a fast monk reconsider her options...

⁴⁶ To which I really don’t remember wheter Niles denied this or not... ?????

⁴⁷ Ah, yes. Because Philippe has been so forthcoming about his own past... Mont-Mirebalais anyone? ©

They did have an affair years ago. But she seems to have this mad-on against Rudolph van Richten and George Weathermay. ApNeblu tried to tell her to let it go, especially since van Richten is supposed to be dead. The Maison de l'Anneau wants nothing to do with a vendetta. We also confirm (from info we got from that strange shadowy dream) that Henry Amber, one of Peck the Swan Street Slicer's victims back in Paridon, was a member of the Maison de l'Anneau, a great alchemist and good friend to John⁴⁸. John doesn't know whether or not his death is linked to their group in any way, but does mention that Auraluna Dromdal was a lackey of the Maison. He has no idea what the crazy Dromdal was up to with Peck... He sounds like he regrets havin dealt with her.

So we now have the task of finding this so called *Doom Prophet a.k.a Niles' older brother*. Wonderful. We can leave ApNeblu messages through Aulbesmil in Nartok. I get the distinct impression that Aulbesmil was worried about these people for nothing. Only time will tell. Maybe I judged this lizard dude wrong. ApNeblu is now on his way to Il Aluk to observe the Requiem, Azalin Rex's yearly ceremony of celebrating Darkest Night (on the rebirth of light). He informs us that other members of the Maison will be present and might interfere if they feel like Darkon's lord tries to leave our world (?) and things get too dangerous for the city's welfare. They also want to study and learn as much as they can

Oh I forget one important fact. Those runes were to make the house burn down! Which they did once we had left. We also did end up telling him that Aulbesmil flubbed his job all those years ago with that depot back in Thistle.⁴⁹ So now he knows that's where we got our book about his little cabal. We did confirm this to him in the end of course.

After all is said and done, it's 5:00pm. I really hate to leave so many books to burn but I have no way to carry them all back to Paridon. We say our goodbyes and leave the house. We have decided to wait for George and head North and then back to Paridon to begin our search for Niles' older brother. That's it for now. I'm hungry and hope Philippe has some luck with his hunting.

⁴⁸ *Shut-In* from session one.

⁴⁹ Info from way back during session three, *Within the Circle*.

Session Seventeen – *From Aulbes to Nartok / A Plague of Shadows, part one.*¹

(Played January 14th, 2009)

December 16th, 750. Not far from ApNeblu's burning house...

It takes Philippe three hours to hunt. Finally! I was getting to the point where I'd eat a tree! Niles studied his new spell and I read about Port D'Elhour while Philippe was out hunting. I read about it basically in case we ever do end up traveling to Souragne... We spend a quiet evening and only really hear small animal noises. We do our normal watch with Phil, Niles then I last. The only action we get that night is the snow. Yipee!!!! That sure is a change to what normally goes on, eh...

December 17th, 750. Same ole place... except the ApNeblu house is burnt to the ground...

It's 10am and we hear horse's hooves. It turns out to be the ever smiling George Weathermay. *I think he needs a good laugh or else he really needs to, well to put it frankly, get laid!* And he's alone. We tell him that Natalia Vorishkova is an acquaintance of John ApNeblu and explain to him what we know about her that ApNeblu tried to get her to forget about getting revenge since van Richten is dead and no good may come out of all this. He also mentioned she might have gone North. He asks us about good ole Johnny Boy, but we keep it pretty vague.² We ask him if he's heard of the Herald of Annihilation. The Dukkar, from Vistani myth, is what he's heard of. He goes to see the burnt lair of ApNeblu and we follow him. We tell him we don't understand why he burned it down... *We sure are good actors :P*

He asks us what we plan to do. We're going to Paridon to look into this prophet of doom. (Niles sure has an interesting brother, to say the least.) We tell him Niles and I had a vague dream about this. He can send us a message through Joachim Aulbesmil. *Yes guys, I have an interest in him, ok! Ya bunch of perverts!* We learn that there is a religious festival farther up North because of the winter solstice, Darkest Night they call it. George mentions that the Kargat, which is apparently the secret police of King Azalin, should be there *en masse*. Why is it so secret if half the population knows about it? George is going there in hopes of perhaps running into Natalia.

By 12:30pm he is gone. We decide to pass by Aulbes. It's a one day horse ride from ApNeblu's burnt lair. Halfway there we hear wolves howling. On each side of the road, we can see them and the three of us shoot arrows & bolts at them. Well la dee da! The boys miss, but I don't. Four or five wolves put themselves in our way. Niles uses his freaky deaky Lamordian earpiece to speak with them. They say they're to attack us because their "master" ordered them to. Now there are ten or more surrounding us now.

¹ *A Plague of Shadows* is from Open Design's *Tales of Zobeck* private commission.

² They pretty much feed him a half-truth "oh, he's just some scholar..."

Once more a battle ensues. It seems as if there is a crazy huge pack of wolves because we keep eliminating them and more keep literally coming out of the woodwork. We are taking some major damage from them too! All of a sudden someone tosses some odd sphere filled with burning herbs roped together near Phil and I. It begins spewing forth smoke. Then we realize there's a horseman in the woods and he tosses two more of those odd spheres. The wolves don't like the smoke at all and flee the scene. The horseman is Lorent Sarkazy, the gamekeeper from the forests and friend and ally of George Weathermay. He asks us where we're going; we tell him we're on our way back to Aulbes and soon we are racing on our horses through the forest on our way there. Sarkazy gives us a wolf repellent ball. He leaves us near Aulbes and moves on.

It's the end of the day and everything is quiet when we get to Aulbes. We do meet up with Ghini, Lord Aulbesmil's right-hand. She looks tired. Guess it's hard on her because we're not around to do her job. Bahahahahahahah! Apparently the town organized a search/battue for the beast in the forest, an owlbear. And they found it. The Crimson Death is still going on. Silas Armand, noted alchemist, was sent from Nartok to help out. He's made potions with herbs and, well eeeww, owlbear innards and stuff. It seems to help the sick. It seems that if people survive the first few days of the disease, they manage to overcome the disease. So Silas is making potions to make people stronger so they can fight this thing. The man looks really tired. Like he hasn't slept in a couple of days... We warn Ghini about the wolves in the forest and that they're controlled by someone. Ghini writes out a letter to Joachim after we tell her we're going to go see him. We end up staying the night at the inn. Oh before I forget, Mary is still in quarantine. We do a watch but nothing happens. Well that is except for Niles who gets his groove on with the same lady again.

December 18th, 750. Inn at Aulbes.

Durnaine offers us a free breakfast. He is still grateful we cleared his name during the *Cloten the wererat business*. Silas sees us and wishes us a good day. We leave and it's a half a day's ride to Nartok. *Hey we're in reality really lost because of the map we have. Even Patrick was a little confused! In the end it all works out fine. Good thing it wasn't Patrick actually making us a map because who knows where we'd of ended up!!!! :P~³*

We arrive around 4pm and enter via the Dwarf Gate which is the West Gate. *We're really lost, even with a real map. Man are we terrible!*⁴ We go to see Joachim Aulbesmil. As a side note, Nartok is also known as Fortress Nartok because of its proximity to Falkovnia or something like that, which is one of the reasons Azalin gives the city some leeway when it comes to its independent streak... They are the first line of defense against Drakov. Joachim's office is in Upper Nartok. It's too late so we will see him tomorrow. We end up at the Seven Bells Tavern. It's a *&!% noble inn. Sorry, but most nobles grind my gears as you might have well guessed since you've been reading my diaries. The

³ This reminds me. Whoever has the map, could you make a photocopy so I remember exactly what I gave you guys... I'm only the DM after all... ☺

⁴ I would like to point out that I had nothing to do with this one. They now each have a copy of the Nartok map : Actually the Zobeck map from the kick-ass *Open Design Gazetteer* from Wolfgang Baur

popular ale of the place is called Chimney Sweep Stout from the Brewers' Sisterhood. Hah! Women have to show men how to make ale right! Go sisters go! I have a tisane. I don't like to cloud my mind or body with alcohol. But that's my choice. For once we spend a really pleasant evening.

We are approached by some long nosed skinny rat lookalike, by the name of Yuri Tepeck. So anyways, this guy says he's an envoy of the Mouse King? Well Yuri looks like a rat maybe he should be called the Rat King. I bet that it's a guild. In Paridon, there are guilds, I'm not foreign to them. I don't particularly like them so Yuri already has three strikes against him.⁵ The Mouse King on behalf of the Mouse Kingdom want to thank us for taking care of Cloten. Well, duh, you dunce, we did it because it was the right thing to do, ya ignoramous! So as a favor, we ask him to find out about Natalia, since, you know, we did him and his nimrods a favor. I don't expect much. As a side note, I don't like us being known by some underworld hooligans. We tell him Natalia is a Werewolf. I figure if this guys is a Wererat and so is the Mouse King, it might incite them to actually find us some info on Natalia. George would appreciate it. Yuri is surprised we can be reached by the Lord Aulbesmil. He also mentions that they make sure things run smoothly for the river trade too for the city (which might be what Cloten the wererat was interfering with)...

December 19th, 750. Silver Bell's inn, Nartok.

It's noon. Everyone slept eight hours straight. We return downstairs and after lunch we head to Joachim's office for 2pm. We wait an hour before seeing him. Kuromak, the Caliban King exits Joachim's office and seems unhappy. We enter and give Aulbesmil Ghini's letter. We do ask him about the Mouse King. He knows of him, but nothing more. Ahem, hear ye, hear ye. I gots me a hot dinner date with Joachim at his place for 7pm! *Sigh* Okay so, yeah. It's a really swell evening. I learn he has no children, has never been married. I tell him about lil ole me. Anyways I think the evening was really awesome, cause I ended up kissing him on the cheek! He was a real gentleman, because if it were for him, I think we'd of done like Niles and his lady friend. Ha!

December 20th, 750. Silver Bells inn, Nartok.

Quiet day. We restock. I do buy a fancy dress. Heh heh. I also send Joachim a message telling him how much I enjoyed myself the night before.

December 21st, 750. Silver Bells inn, Nartok.

Another quiet day until I have a vision at midnight. Or was it a dream? Not sure. I see King Azalin in the middle of an arcane ceremony and surrounded by hundreds if not thousands of people. Then I see him shrivel and turn to dust and some bones. I also see his crown fall to the ground and get slowly blown in the wind until even the wind dies down. He exploded or there was an arcane explosion. And all present, also fell to the ground and died on the spot!

⁵ [Does Miranda know there are all kinds of guilds? What makes her think it's a Thieves' Guild?](#)

After the explosion, they seem to rise from the dead! Holy Cow! They rise as undead, some seem to still have intelligence, others merely look like an empty shell, while the souls of others leave their lifeless corpses... I get really cold for some reason. As it happens, so do other have the same dream, I think. The whole inn seems to have woken from the same dream I had.

Then we all hear a voice, perhaps it's Azalin's, and a word is spoken as if it is carved on my soul: "*Necropolis*". We also feel/know that the city of Il Aluk is no more. That's just creepy enough to freak me out, man. It's even more messed up than the image of Peck wearing girls clothing way back at Auraluna Dromdal's house! As the guys and I deal in different areas of the arcane and supernatural, we are fine as we wake, but we can tell from the sobs and cries that some people aren't faring so well.

December 22nd, 750. Silver Bells inn, Nartok.

There are now sick people on the streets of Nartok. They've got black ugly lymph nodes on their necks. It's not like the Crimson Death. We go see Joachim. I give his unwelcoming secretary my name and we see him in like three minutes. Hee hee! We warn him about the sickness. Apparently, everyone in Nartok had the same dream last night. That's messed up! Rumours abound for sure. The sickness worsens and Joachim has the city locked down for now. We leave his office. In lower Nartok, the Ashmill district is where there are more sick people. The area is quarantined by the city. We basically patrol the streets of Nartok with special papers from my buddy for the next few days.

December 28th, 750. Silver Bells inn, Nartok.

I have a vision of a young girl of eight or nine years old with freckles, dark red hair and a dirty dress. She lies on a roughly hewn bench in an earthen cell. Her eyes are closed and she seems to be repeating the same words over and over again and again. I don't understand what she's saying. I should have learned how to read lips. HAHHAHAHAHAHAH! Then shadows come from everywhere and seem to well, eat her? Then I see a humanoid form, with horns. And then Blackness. I see streets of cobblestone and armed people walking shoulder to shoulder. Then blackness arrives at blinding speed towards the people. I think this is in Nartok. As the Blackness rushes towards the gathering, the darkness explodes and shatters like glass!!!!

Well that's all for now, people. As happened a few times before, I feel more capable in certain aspects of my abilities. I'll talk about that during my next entry! See ya later.

Session Eighteen – *A Plague of Shadows, part two.*⁶

(Played February 18th, 2009)

December 28th, 750 : Nartok, Darkon

(P.S - Patrick I just remembered that Miranda was part of a little Thieves' gang in Paridon in her youth. Thus I am presuming she knows about a thieves' guild or even what a thieves' guild is! That is in response to you commenting on how would Miranda know about a thieves' guild! ⁷)

We decide to investigate the sickness in the city. Just by asking around, we discover there are quite a few guilds in Nartok. As we look at the walls erected within the city to surround the Ashmill district we see some nasty pikes on top of them making it next to impossible to get in or out of the quarantined neighbourhood. Can't say as I blame them. We make it to the gate into Ashmill. There are six guards and one cleric or priest type there dressed in white, gloves and mask included. Of course getting in is easy, but getting out is another tale entirely. The holy man tells us we can get in but must be marked with the symbol of Marena. We discover from the dude something about this goddess Marena, the Goddess of lust, sickness and death. Not my kind of religion, but her worshippers might be responsible for this black pestilence. She has no Temple in town and it is a clandestine sect. The dude's name is Videm.

(Yes I am a stickler for names, eh guys? Just want to see Pat flinch one day and muff a name!)

Videm tells us the pestilence started around the 22nd. That's the same time we had the strange dreams about Azalin dying in Il Aluk. There are a lot of sick people in Ashmill, over 50% of the population there is infected. Some houses have been burnt, others marked with big red X's on the houses or even Marena's mark. Frankly I don't blame people for being scared. It's just going to make our job harder, that's all.

We get stamped with this Marena sign and enter the area. People look at the ground, not us. So we hear of a gambling hall called the Red Queen through some Calibans who aren't touched by the sickness. I think that's odd and so do the others. We learn this from Abak, the leader of four Calibans taking dead people in a wagon out of the city. (You see I forgot to mention, I think, we can't exit the Ashmill district until the plague subsides. Trying to escape is punishable by death. Those are lord Aulbesmil's orders.) Abak will be important later. They take trips morning, noon and night from Ashmill with their death wagons. The city's bureaucrats keep a tally of the dead.

We learn about the W heatsheaf tavern and the Cloven Nine from Abak. Niles wants to go gambling so we head to the Red Queen first. There Niles gambles with some Calibans while Phil and I try to get some information. The clientele inside is around 90 Calibans to

⁶ *A Plague of Shadows* is from Open Design's *Tales of Zobeck* private commission.

⁷ Actually, I was just wondering *why* she thought it was a thieves' guild for sure... ☺

10 humans. There is a rumor that this group, the Cloven Nine, deals in diabolism. They could be responsible for the outbreak but I doubt it. Niles charms a Caliban but I forget where exactly.

In the street, we run into an old man. He appears to be crazy. And I think he and some weirdos drink goat's milk to tell the future or something like that. Niles and Phil get friendly with him and he seems to be lucid during their kindness towards him. Some of the only stuff he tells us that makes sense is: "*And thus the Dark Men come at night and devour us in our sleep! They are scavengers of the night, come to drag us all into death!*" And he finally adds before starting to ramble again: "*Bright light is poison to the Dark Men*"

(Good thing Niles and Phil rolled highly, else we'd of learned nothing from this street bum!)

Ok let's backtrack. I am not good at taking notes sometimes, heh. In the gambling hall, we learn that Akad is the chief of the Cloven Nine. They are into diabolism, prostitution and slave rings [I think I need to talk one on one to Akad about that with my two friends - right and left fist.], they're all around not nice people and into black magic. Some people have given offerings to Marena. I guess when it comes down to a serious sickness, people will do anything.

On our way to the Wheatsheaf tavern, we run into three shadow things. As usual, a battle ensues. We do win but I have these really bad black scabs/marks on my neck. Phil has tinier ones. I think it has to do with their attacks. When they succeed an attack, our strength wanes. I've never felt this weak. Maybe a cleric or priest could help us?

Once battle is done, the boys and myself have visions of the little girl once more. That's messed up! In this *dream*, the girl from the night before lays still once again, forming the same unknown words, but when she opens her mouth she seems to make only clicking sounds and the occasional grind of gears and wheels. Lights pass over her face at great speed, as if she were quickly moving through a semi-lit corridor. Then the visions quickly moves to become a flat grassy expanse and a well-tended white manse. Gold and purple silk standards whip against the wind atop masts. The black wave from the previous night's vision erupts from below the manse and rushes towards us before shattering once more. As the dark wave crumbles it reveals the girl in her earthen cell, with dark forms coalescing above and around her. In an instant, we each see ourselves in the place of the young girl.

We search the area and it's now 2:30pm. We finally find the house with the banners! Niles decides to go invisible and investigate the place from outside. I put a scarf on to hide my neck as does Phil. So we have learned this family is one of silk importers/exporters. Forget where I heard it. Niles sees a light inside. There's a man and woman inside in the same room. As well, he sees a child's room, but no child.

We knock at the door, and I speak to the man answering me with a raised crossbow. As

I've great diplomacy, I think our attempt failed miserably. So we kind of bluff our way inside the entrance by saying lord Aulbesmil has sanctioned us to investigate the district because of the plague, but no farther. Finally this man, Orem Koppa, throws caution to the wind, yells "run!" and fires a bolt with his crossbow at Phil. I try to fake an attempt to run after whomever he yelled to, but fail ans as I come back he also shoots me with a bolt from his crossbow. Finally we manage to knock him out.

Now we get his wife Laura as well. I tell them about my dream. They tell us their daughter, Nashya, has the Sorcerer's Curse. Talk about backwater hillbillies! They also tell us that their daughter has been kidnapped. Orem strongly suspects the Zilas family kidnapped Nashya in retaliation for the Koppas not selling their silkhives and looms. After Nashya's disappearance, a pouch of gold coins wrapped in a ball of silk and bearing a note was left on their doorstep. The note said Nashya would die if the guard was summoned or appeared inside the Koppa family courtyard.

Okay so I think what happened is that Nashya's powers manifested as she was attacked or kidnaped by these shadowy fiends. Her power warned us that she was captured. Orem offered us gold to bring her back alive, but we'll do it for no fee. I don't mind, really. We learn about the Cartways below Nartok and where part of my dream could have transpired according to Orem. I think Nashya is powerful for such a young girl. She needs some kind of guidance in the arcane of which her parents can't offer.

The Cartways were the tunnels used in the mines below Nartok 80 years ago. Sorry about how the journal follows, I'm feeling odd. Those shadows drained me bad and I'm unsure if I can survive if everyone who gets infected dies. We are now headed to find Abak so he might secretly transport us out of Ashmill with other sick people. Orem tells us where the entrance to the Cartways is.

That's it for now. I'll be in touch later when I feel better...

Session Nineteen – *A Plague of Shadows, part three.*⁸ (*Played March 3rd, 2009*)

December 28th, 750 : Nartok, Darkon

We find Abak and explain that we'd like to escape from the Ashmill district... We still see X's on doorways as we walk the streets by the way. So after we bribe Abak, his pals hide us among the dead in their cadaver cart. We seem to notice that there are no rats at all in the streets. I think that's odd given the current circumstances in Ashmill.

So Abak gets us out of Ashmill and back into the whole city proper. Of course, Niles magically charming him helps a lot. Soon we are on the streets and come upon a crowd who is surrounding a guy. The people seem to be angry and are tossing rocks at the man. From what we make out, it appears he promised them something and the promise didn't

⁸ *A Plague of Shadows* is from Open Design's *Tales of Zobeck* private commission.

fall through. The crowd tosses rocks at him and then I have enough so I move towards the scene, and using one of my abilities, I grow in height and weight and tell the crowd to disperse. They do so and upon further inspection of the man we discover it is Silas Armand, Joachim's alchemist.⁹

After talking a bit to him about what he's doing and what we're doing he gives us potions which seem to cure our afflictions to some extent. He does warn us that it only works once a week (which is what the crowd misunderstood and why they got upset). Plus, he gives us extras just in case. Pretty soon we find the entrance to the so-called Cartways. So we descend there and eat rations, while talking about what to do next.

After our meal, we see Nashya but she is translucent as a ghost. She beckons us to follow her, which we do. According to Philippe, she's magical. I gather that's rather obvious given the circumstances. So we follow her until she passes through a wall. We see a door and hear some voices. We try to open the locked clockwork door without success. Niles finally uses the wand of shaping stone to open the door and then it fizzles out, but it does work and we pass inside. (Except Niles is really certain that this was the last energy left in the wand.¹⁰) We get to a cell and find someone mistreating a small figure inside. We rush in! One dude was invisible and got a free attack on Niles cos. He and Phil strike back against the invisible man and two other men rush into the room. Phil sees them. It turns out it's not Nashya but a simple decoy. They were on to us.

Some dudes run out with Nashya in another direction. [Sorry no map here so going from memory]. I run after them. Thanks to a monk's speed, I can run pretty fast.¹¹ They take Nashya to a railed wagon and push ahead. There are tracks here for the wagons as if they were train tracks? So they push ahead. I run after them and actually catch up to them because I'm faster. Mwahaahhaahhahahah!¹² A fight ensues even as the wagon advances and, after a while, Niles & Phil show up and eventually catch up with us. They use their spells from afar to help me and finally we defeat the bad guys and retrieve Nashya!

N.B.: Picture Indiana Jones in the first movie and the scene in the underground on mine carts on rails. That was what happened in the chase.¹³

⁹ Joachim Aulbesmil (an NPC from Dungeon 130, *Within the Circle* adventure), the lord mayor of Nartok (again a blend of Nartok in Darkon, Ravenloft and Zobeck, Open Design's default setting. AND, I can't help but notice that Miranda is on a first name basis with the guy and has really cut down on the snotty comments about him, which is really cool from a role-playing POV. I think the character has somewhat grown on my players. I guess I am doing something right. ☺)

¹⁰ Niles got a really high spellcraft roll, so I house-ruled that he figured out that his wand was spent. That object was empty a while ago, but the PC always managed these really cool entrances, so I let them use it more than I probably should have.

¹¹ Have I mentioned how much monks annoy me? I am serious. I know they are canon and all and have a nice place in Ravenloft, but Steve keeps throwing my organized plans out of whack every once in a while... Damn him! Damn monks! ☺

¹² See what I mean. Very annoying, I say!

¹³ Looking back on this chase scene, I should have changed a couple of things to make it harder on Miranda, but I was a bit surprised to see her catch up so quickly with them. But I had fun, I remember healing potions and spells being used afterwards and Niles being hit by a couple of lanterns and falling into the cold cistern... Ah, good times...

So we end up beating the bad guys and recover some items as well from them as well as Nashya. There are some gems, rubies and gold. We split that up evenly. There's a flask of some oil and a potion? Also Nashya had some blue residue on her lips. Thanks to Niles, we discover it is from Akori Blossom. It's a narcotic they used to keep her sedated. We find a pendant of a clock on one bad guy who isn't dead. We wait for him to waken, but he is mute. Just wonderful. His belt buckle has the big letter Z on it. Zilas, huh? I think so and I'm sure the guys do too.

He ends up being the son of the Zilas family cursed to be mute by them gypsies, the Vistani. Lucky guy if you ask me... NOT! He has an amulet of a clock. What's that all about?

Nashya wakes up and tells us in an almost feverish tone:

"I saw you in my mind. I knew that you would come, but now you must hurry! The sickness is my fault. The blue paste left me awake, but dreaming. I was frightened and my mind wandered. Into darkness and Mists. I followed voices and found him. The Dark Prince! He came through the well. You must stop him! His people feast upon us all. Their hunger will never end! You must close the portal that connects our world to the shadows. You must slay the Dark Prince within the next three days, lest the portal to his world bursts open and swallows this city! He wants only to rule over a city of Shadows, Ash and Mists!"

For now, we bring Nashya back to her house. Of course, Videm is at the Ashmill checkpoint, a little confused and annoyed at us for being out, but lets us back in with a warning, blah, blah, blah, etc... So we bring Nashya back to her very grateful parents and sleep there for the night. We almost rushed in but Nashya did tell us we have three days to solve this before it's too late. We decide to rest and heal up. In the morning we will go investigate this pit.

Nashya's parents explain to us that this pit the little girl saw in a vision had been dug for water years ago. But over the years, runoff and slag from the Nartok foundries seeped into the well and turned its waters black. When miners became sick, the well was sealed off and forgotten.

Until tomorrow morning...

Session Twenty – A Plague of Shadows, part four and end (and Somewhat of an End altogether).¹⁴

(Played July 27th, 2009)

December 29th, 750 : Nartok, Darkon

So Philippe will babysit Nashya while we go underground... We do get paid 500 gp each for our efforts by her family. Better than nothing, I suppose. Nashya tells us that we have three days to close the portal. She saw all this in a vision?! Like I said before, she's got some sorcerous out-of-control powers. Phil and Niles also seem to think that because of

¹⁴ *A Plague of Shadows* is from Open Design's *Tales of Zobeck* private commission.

that necromantic Requiem explosion in Il Aluk a few days ago, there might be some kind of thing-a-majit rift opened to some dark energies. Whatever. Just give me some bad guy to pounce on at this point!

Like I said, we learned from Nashya's parents that quite a few years ago there used to be a silver mine under Nartok worked by the Caliban population before it went dry. Also, the mine was abandoned. So, again, through her vision, Nashya points us to an old well whose water was corrupted by the slag from the mine and closed off after some people got intoxicated drinking from it. That should be where we need to go to close off this rift and heal the city from this *Creeping Plague*. Before we leave, Niles identifies the pendant taken from Penjir Zilas.¹⁵ It has five charges left. You can do many things with it but with only five charges we won't get very far. I won't bore you with the sordid details of this bizarre item. What is of interest though is that Nashya tells us that destroying this item should close off this rift, but might also ignite some time effect(!). Niles seems to think this would be too dangerous.

We notice the city now has an increased clockwork watchmen presence. They were created a while ago but ever since the sickness began in the city Joachim has activated more of them. So we leave at 10:00am for the pit of despair (is what I'll call it). We get there and there are boards blocking our way so I remove them. I enter first as always. It goes some 15 feet below by stairs and we can feel cool air. The stairs are really shoddy and descend 30 feet lower.

This open pit is marked by broken mortar and stones that once served as the lip to this large well. Inside the mouth of the well lies a dark gash that stands out against even the surrounding darkness. The gash seems to pulsate in mid-air, and bleeds shadows like a gaping wound.

We walk 100 feet or so and only really find fallen boulders or rocks. And it's just as cold as Winter outside which is really unnatural. Good thing we're already dressed up warm for the season?¹⁶ Wow, talk about fun. This place does, in fact look like a mine now that I look around properly. I've had this super night vision for a little while now which neither Niles nor Philippe have.¹⁷ These boulders and rocks are left from the silver ore of the mine. Not good quality, this silver. Guess the Calibans realised that and packed up and left too. Now my legendary luck kicks in. Thanks to my expert reflexes [er, high roll I think, hee hee], I... uh... narrowly miss some falling debris from the mine. Yeah, that's my story and I'm sticking to it. Mmm-hmmm....

¹⁵ CLOCKWORK PENDANT

This pendant resembles an ornate, miniature clock. By winding the dial and consciously spending one charge, you can cast *haste*, *slow*, or *displacement*. The spell only lasts for 3 rounds. Only one spell cast from a *clockwork pendant* can be active at a time. Casting a second spell negates the existing spell effect. Destroying the pendant creates a *temporal stasis* effect as a 10-foot cube if at least three charges remain. From Open Design's *Tales of Zobeck* private commission.

¹⁶ Yeah, they got lucky with that one didn't they?

¹⁷ Miranda now has Darkvision 30' from her Shadowsworn abilities.

We keep walking further and spot a column of wood, then four more of them around what seems to be the abandoned well we were told about. They appear to be holding up the ceiling. Guess I don't have to be an engineer to figure that one out, eh guys? ☺ We come to a pit. We notice our shadows are acting freaky-deaky and attack us. How f***ed up is that? There is also present the Shadow Prince, some bigger ShadowFiend or some such.¹⁸ We spy unconscious and apparently hurt figures near the closed well (now an eldritch darkness pit or something equally joyful). Niles mentions that maybe we should have thought out our plan a bit more before we just barged in¹⁹... Anyways, we do prevail, but by the time we wrap this up, Niles is severely weakened and I am almost passed out from pain and necromantic energies... The Prince of Darkness was immune to mundane weapons and Niles' arcane energies were rather depleted by the end.²⁰

The two unconscious and almost dead figures by the well are Johan and Allen²¹ We try to heal some of their wounds and care for them. They belong to the Geargrinders' guild which is responsible for gear devices and clockwork devices in the city. Not my cup of tea, but I suppose some poor sap has to do it. We also learn about this Nartok deity called Rava, Goddess of Gears, Trade, Fate and Industry. Afterwards, because we saved them, the two men give us papers stating we helped them so maybe we might get some help at the Temple of Rava. We head there and meet a Father Palkado on visit from the temple of Lada, the Golden Goddess (who seems to be some kind of variation of Ezra). We give him the letters and he helps us free of charge. He heals Niles and I to some extent. It's not perfect, but it'll do for now. I hope we get some rest after this. Oh, to get there we used our ole pal Abak (the Caliban undertaker, "bring out your dead!") to smuggle us out of the Ashmill district and into the city proper once more! I guess Niles' charm lasts a long time. I'm still learning about spells to be honest.

From there we head for Joachim's office and are made to wait until I tell the slow and dull secretary that *I, Miranda Corneliu*, am here to see the Lord-Mayor. Geez, it takes almost no time for him to see us. But if it were up to her, we'd have waited three months. Ok, take a deep breath. We decide that we need official papers to help us in our endeavours in the city. Joachim gets us the papers with relative ease. He seems rather pleased with this, but also a bit worried about my safety. (How sweet, really...) While we're in the waiting room, we see two other people. One looks formed in magic and the other is no other than Silas the Alchemist! Fancy meeting him here. The other man is Zorian and is head of the chartered brotherhood of alchemists and mixed up with the

¹⁸ A simple Shadow really, but at level 5 with few magic items and the Shrouds (new monsters from *A Plague of Shadows*) attacking them too, this combat took its toll.

¹⁹ Laz literally went: "Maybe we should have planned something before just breaking down the door guns blazing this time?"

²⁰ I remember Niles losing *some* strength and Miranda's strength going from 13 to 1! I also remember repeating clearly that destroying the pendant *might* destroy the rift like Nashya had said but Laz (Niles) said that he wanted to keep such an item. Ah well, c'est la vie! ☺ This was the first time that I really thought someone might not make it through an adventure. We've had hurt characters before, Philippe almost dying, but this was almost it this time for one of them...

²¹ Steve: Yes I love to pester Patrick about names, just so he can make them up so I can mark them down. Don't tell him, but I do that on purpose... D-OH!!!!!!!!!!!!!! He reads this... Oh well... Ok)

Arcane Collegium. We do end up asking Silas for a few potions of healing or even elixirs. He tells us to come see him at his house at 7:00pm.

Ok. So once we're done, I get a room which Joachim pays for. Nice man, after all that's said and done. So I have a bath and get ready. I have a dinner with Joachim. It goes relatively well and we talk about he and myself for the most part. At the end of the evening both he and I kiss!!!!!!!

He's a good kisser, by the way.

30th December, 750: Nartok, Darkon

So the guys and I have breakfast together. There are no new plague cases and those who had it are starting to feel better. I think we gone done kill the source o'the sickness! The exact rumour is that brave adventurers faced some Dark, Mist Creatures. So we get approached by the Mouse King himself (and not one of his lackey which is fine by me) who says he'll bring us more info about the *Ruinchylid prophecy* we asked about. And to boot, he might have an item or two that may help us. Maybe. Hey, we did a solid for the Mouse King, he should fix us up with these items! Come to think of it, I'm not sure what to make of this Mouse King and his Mice Kingdom... Even they're a bunch of rats and, apparently, wererats, they don't appear to be evil...

Well that's it for now, I'll talk to you real soon!

And so this is Miranda's last journal (for the foreseeable future). I also have a few comments about the campaign that I've forgotten to mention in the last few logs. When Il Aluk exploded and became Necropolis, the world's fabric was affected, magic became somewhat different. In game terms, this means we started using the Pathfinder RPG Beta rules set. Now with Plague of Shadows over, the rift has been closed and the proverbial (magical) dust settles. Again, in game terms, this means we switched to the Pathfinder RPG rules set.

I am not sure what shape the next journal will take. Since Steve has to take a (long) break, Miranda is out of the picture for a while. And so is Joël (Au revoir, Philippe!) I might use them as NPCs. Still not sure yet, but I have a few ideas with what I want to do here. So, as a DM, I am left with Niles Nicholson (Laz's character), Laz has gracefully decided to continue this journal of Niles' adventures. Niles has a few things he wants to keep to himself, nothing Mist-shattering, but things close to him. I'll respect that if Miranda and Philippe come back.

Please check out Niles Nicholson's Journal.

Patrick