

Niles Nicholson's Journal

DM: Patrick Plouffe aka Jonathan Winters of the Fraternity of Shadows boards

Players: Patrice Lazure (playing Niles)
Steve Flam aka Tarlyn (playing Miranda) – Player is AWOL ☺
Joël Paquin (of the FoS) (playing Philippe Mathurine) – Player is AWOL ☺

This is Niles' personal journal of his adventures. There might be some slight differences between what Niles perceived and what actually happened.

The first twenty sessions of this campaign are described in Miranda's journal.¹

Session Twenty-one – So Many Losse Ends, so Little Time... To Find a New Purpose... and The Knave of Parts, part one.²

(Played September 28th, 2009)

January 7th, 751: Nartok, Darkon.

So I have decided to write a journal of my adventures. This decision was made in part, I must admit, to lessen the burden of solitude that now weighs on my shoulders as life has made me a lonesome adventurer once again. But the most important factor is the usefulness of such a process: I can't remember how many times a long forgotten detail, looking unimportant at the time, was retrieved through Miranda's journal when it became essential to our quest. With that in mind, I must thank Miranda for letting me copy her journal before I leave Nartok. She also gave me a very special dagger that Lord Aulbesmil had given her, and I immediately felt its magic as I held it in my hand.

So like I said, I am now adventuring alone. Miranda has decided to stay in Nartok a little while. She explained to me that she needed time to sort out her conflicted emotions, that she felt torn between her growing interest for Lord Aulbesmil's charms, her vows to her monastic order, and her longing for the excitement of adventuring. I sincerely hope that she will find happiness in whichever life she ends up choosing for herself. And if that choice happens to be the most adventurous one, I will certainly welcome her back by my side. Philippe has decided to stay in Nartok too, to take little Nashya under his wing. I can't certainly blame him for that choice, as that little girl really needs guidance to control and accept her sorcerous powers. I hope that Philippe can help her reach her full potential, and once that task is accomplished, that he will be able to join me again. For my part, I am still determined to go back to Paridon, to find that Ruinchyld that both Miranda and I dreamt about³, but I have decided to wait for the Mouse King's promised items. I am scheduled to meet with Yuri Tupeck later today and I intend to depart for Paridon shortly after. Hopefully, the skinny rogue won't deceive me and the items will compensate for the lost time.

¹ Please note that all references to previous game sessions are taken from *Miranda's Journal*. And all DM comments are in the new snazzy purple colour.

² *The Knave of Parts* is from Open Design's *Tales of Zobeck* private commission.

³ Session Fifteen, *House of Ap Neblu (con't): Of a Dream, a Death and of the Past...*

I feel I should go back on that Ruinchyld dream a little more, since it has intrigued me to the point of becoming the center of my quest. In fact, I am not even sure it was a dream, or possibly some trans-dimensional alteration of reality, or some interactive vision of the past. The fact that Miranda had the exact same "dream" is certainly disturbing, and after waking up, I felt as if I had been in the past, and that my actions there had somewhat changed the present. Anyway, in that dream / alternate reality, I was Largo, a guy who was apparently receiving money from Cloten's illegal operations⁴ and Miranda was Henry Amber, a guy killed by Peck, the Swan street Slicer that we battled on our first adventure⁵. We met with John Apneblu, who asked us to kill a child who, should he be allowed to live, would bring many disasters to the world. Being unable to harm a child, I bluffed John into thinking I would do it, but I actually told the parents to hide the child away. We later learned that the child was a Ruinchyld, with a birthmark in the shape of a key. I also revealed to my companions that the house where I found the baby back in Paridon's alternate reality was actually my childhood home, that the child's parents were my parents. They somehow deduced from that little info that the child was my eldest brother...

I guess I should also recap what I did during the last few days, since Miranda's last entry in her journal. Well, I managed to get access to an alchemy lab, thanks to lord Aulbesmil. Unfortunately, my talents for the craft seem to have rusted during the last few months, as I lost more raw materials than I managed to produce items. Through all the frustration, I managed to make a vial of memory coagulant, which I'm not even totally convinced it will be efficient, and a wolfsbane herbal solution. Other than that, not much to report, except maybe that more and more people are renaming Il Aluk "Necropolis", which is totally coherent with the vision we all had on that December 21st frightful night⁶.

My meeting with Yiri Tepeck actually went pretty well. He offered me his thanks once again in the name of the Mouse King. He gave me a ring of protection (+2) and a wand of *magic missiles*. I guess it was worth the wait after all. When I came back to my room at the Wheatsheaf Inn, there was a parchment placed on my bed. I quickly cast a spell to make sure there wasn't any suspicious magic on the thing and then I unrolled it. It was a translation of an old prophecy from ancient draconic, something that John Apneblu had promised us a while ago⁷, but that I had completely forgotten.

The Ruinchyld and his era of utter darkness,
Ruinchyld, here lies thy world's destiny.

It begins in a burnt house⁸ forgotten then found, words written, forgotten, remembered...
and a long trek through cold to unanswered questions⁹...
Beware Friends, enemies and those who are both...

Scholars, wanderers, alchemysts, men & wyrmlings¹⁰, all shall look for thee within days of,
the death of a kyng¹¹

⁴ Session Twelve, from Dungeon #131 - *The Beasts of Aulbesmil / House of Ap Neblu*.

⁵ Sessions One and Two, *Shut-In* from Dungeon 128 & Introduction to *Within the Circle* from Dungeon #130

⁶ Session Seventeen, *From Aulbes to Nartok / A Plague of Shadows, part one*.

⁷ Session Sixteen, *House of ApNeblu (con't): Where our heroes have a long discussion...*

⁸ Probably refers to the house from la Maison de l'anneau, which we were hired to burn down.

Sessions Two to Five, from Dungeon #130 - *Within the Circle*.

⁹ Probably refers to our trek to snow and cold in Lamordia.

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

¹⁰ This prophecy definitely seems to be about us: I am an alchemist, Miranda is a scholar and Philippe is a wanderer; I guess the wyrmling would be ApNeblu

the years of the longest night¹², the rise of dead cities and arcane empires of the dead¹³.

amidst such chaos of raised armies and imminent wars¹⁴, the freed city's¹⁵ streets shall be steeped in blood most dire, from within and without.

For Sarastra of the night and the arcane,
the dark fey and somber earth people¹⁶,
they will build for her a castle of obsidian upon the land of the dead and paid for with the sole heir of
a felled house of shadows¹⁷, look to the shadows for the bryght sword.

Armed with Her night majesty's long-lost devilish crown,
the last of the hundred emperors, with his legions of the deeplands,
will use to bring about the Death of light...

Ruinchyld, rain down your blood, drown the bloom of life, protecting from unlife, and the crown of
the netherworld and then strike down hardest with shadows bryght to destroy the jewels,
with it the death of the lost kyng of the dead realm...

Mayhaps the kyng shall return and sit in his kyngdom...
Or the Night Queen shall bring all to shadows...

Obsessed by this intriguing prophecy, I spent the rest of the afternoon reading related passages of Miranda's journal, searching the town's archives and subtly questioning the town's inhabitants, in hope of finding additional clues. I actually found a few things, most of which I annotated directly in the prophecy above. I also learned that apparently, there might also exist a Runechild, a positive force that could balance the evil of the Ruinchyld. I also found out that the Ruinchyld prophecy is akin to an old Hu-Charad legend about an "herald of annihilation". Finally, I gathered from a few old folks in town some info about the Stross family: they apparently had control over the city for more than 600 years, until the revolt, 70-some years ago. The word in the street is that every single member of the family was hanged, no matter how young or how old they were, but apparently, the prophecy is in disagreement, referring to a "sole heir". I was told that their castle is probably still standing, albeit it might show some damage from years of abandon. It is now owned by the city of Nartok itself, but I couldn't find anyone to tell me its precise location. It is apparently somewhere outside the city limits, near a Caliban's mine. Going through Miranda's journal, I recalled a dream I had about this place, the same night we dreamt about the Ruinchyld for the first time:

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

¹¹ Refers to the death of Azalin on December 21st 750, during the transformation of the city of Il Aluk into Necropolis.

¹² Again, the winter solstice, the day of the transformation of Il Aluk into Necropolis.

¹³ Another reference to Necropolis, I would guess.

¹⁴ Aulbesmil told me that Darkon's neighbor, Falkovnia, is mobilizing itself for an impending war.

¹⁵ Nartok is often called the Free City, due to its liberation from the monarchy during the revolt, 70-some years ago.

¹⁶ On first thought, this seems to mean Dark Fey around the Shadow Rift... hopefully, I am wrong about that.

(I do need to say this: So close, yet so far... Patrice's original entry was about Drow, but there are none in RL. Or are there? But the source material has nothing to that effect in-character.)

¹⁷ According to Aulbesmil, the Stross family might have been called by that name.

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). These two gods are related to the Forfarian pantheon, but were worshipped nearly seventy years ago. 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. (...) 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. (...). 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. (...) 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. (...) We yell to warn him! The cloaked man's shadow turns and looks at us? (...) 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? So the cloaked man kills the robed man. The robed man hits 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. We 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 us and the wind howls through the towers and the tree branches. (...) 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. Castle Stross was owned by the Stross family before the revolt. 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... " ¹⁸

Late that night, I decided to take a walk to ponder all the new information and figure out my next course of action. I ended up in some part of town that might not be recommended, especially at night. As I round out a corner, I saw a man with a mask, flanked by two calibans, who was getting

¹⁸ Session Fifteen, *House of Ap Neblu (con't): Of a Dream, a Death and of the Past...*

something out of a scullion¹⁹. Knowing that to be illegal, I yelled at the man to stop and identify himself, but he refused and combat ensued. I cast one of my most recently learn spells and one of the calibans fell to the ground in a *deep slumber*. The man tried to flee. I tried to stop him with another enchantment, but to no avail. I then went after him, firing some *ray of frost* at the still awoke caliban as I went. I left my cat familiar to take care of him while I pursued the apparent leader of the trio. The man was very agile, jumping up and down the stairs of a small tower with amazing speed. After a few of my magical attacks, he fled to the tower's roof. I drank a potion I had and climbed the tower's column, hoping to surprise him while he awaits me to arrive from the stairs. Unfortunelaty, my plan backfired, as the only thing I remember upon arriving on the roof is the sight of a piece of wood approaching my face with dangerous speed. I woke up somewhat later, alone, with my familiar "killer kitty" gently licking my face, and a playing card, a knave, on my chest. The card brought back the memory of some story I heard about someone called "the knave of parts", stealing parts from the scullions for unknown reasons. Looking at the card more attentively, I noticed the initials DK embedded in the design of the card.

I returned to my room at the inn without further incident, thinking that I might have to postpone my departure for Paridon in the light of the recent developments. I certainly need to find that Stross castle before I go. I strongly believe in the accuracy of the prophecy and feel that whatever I shall find there will be of great help in my quest to prevent the danger it predicts. I also need to find the meaning of "Sarastra", in the said prophecy. I also have great curiosity towards that "Knave of parts" guy and as to why he does what he is doing. Finally, if my lost fight of today brings any lesson to be learned, is that I might not be able to do this quest alone. If Miranda and Philippe have chosen to pursue other interests, I must respect their choice, but I should probably find some new companions to share my adventures with. I'm sure that Nartok has some fine adventurers ready to join me and my quest. Maybe Lord Aulbesmil can recommend me a person or two.

It is with these thoughts that I went to sleep to rest and let my injuries heal. I woke up suddenly with the strange impression that I had only slept a few minutes. My first instinct was to splash some cold water in my face to wash that sensation away. As I did so, I saw a reflection in the mirror, but what I saw wasn't my own reflection. It was the image of a young man, in his early 20's, wearing Paridon's clothes from 50-some years ago. I felt the noble blood running through my veins, I remembered the private schools, I remembered the teachings from the austere monks... I remembered my name....Henry Amber....

¹⁹ The scullions are constructs used in Nartok for a variety of purposes, including city guards. They were constructed by Jasna Vorlova, a women with some vistani origins. She is dead now, with no known descendants.