

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

### December 12<sup>th</sup>, 750 : Aulbes, Darkon<sup>2</sup>

After some discussion, we decide to donate the gold found in the mill to the village.<sup>3</sup> 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!*<sup>4</sup>). 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 on<sup>5</sup>, but for now, nope.<sup>6</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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... ☺

<sup>2</sup> 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.)

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Personally, I think she should date Baron Aulbesmil... ☺

<sup>6</sup> 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...)

<sup>7</sup> 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...<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 Temple<sup>10</sup>. I get blood all over my hands. If I get sick, Aulbesmil is so taking care of me!<sup>11</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> ... 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???*

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<sup>8</sup> I really can’t believe you threw that in!? ☺ Funny!

<sup>9</sup> Miranda is always so compassionate.

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

<sup>11</sup> See? She does want Aulbesmil in her life... ☺

- April 3<sup>rd</sup>... 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 15<sup>th</sup> ... The Kargat is getting closer to us, I think... Their activity in Thistle's vicinity has been increasing in the last months...
- November 8<sup>th</sup> ... 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 21<sup>st</sup> ... and I tell my newfound partners about the Wolf God and his teachings how they can help us...
- December 28<sup>th</sup>... 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 Caliban<sup>12</sup> 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?<sup>13</sup> 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

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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!<sup>14</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup>, 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.*<sup>15</sup>

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

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<sup>14</sup> See what I mean about Philippe's *pleasant* disposition?

<sup>15</sup> 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~*)<sup>16</sup>

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 14<sup>th</sup>, 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

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<sup>16</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup>, 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 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

### December 15<sup>th</sup>, 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!<sup>17</sup> 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!!!!!!]**<sup>18</sup>

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!<sup>19</sup> Damn those little pests! This time we were more successful and defeated

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

<sup>18</sup> Be careful what you wish for...

<sup>19</sup> 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 Kitty<sup>20</sup>, 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 now<sup>21</sup>. The more the merrier I say. The list of spells<sup>22</sup> is:

- i. Simple spells:
  1. 1<sup>st</sup> level - Guilt, Proficiency
  2. 2<sup>nd</sup> level – Plunge Deep to the Core,
  3. 3<sup>rd</sup> level - Dragonskin
- ii. Complex spells:
  1. 1<sup>st</sup> level - Illuminated Weapon
  2. 2<sup>nd</sup> level - Shrapnel Globe, Wild Stealth
  3. 3<sup>rd</sup> level – Extended Charge
- iii. Exotic spells:
  1. 1<sup>st</sup> level - Anavar's Anticipated Attack
  2. 2<sup>nd</sup> level – Detoim Nar (Guided Strike),
  3. 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 whatever<sup>23</sup> 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 now<sup>24</sup>. Happy trails and all that and until next time!

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<sup>20</sup> Niles' cat familiar

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

<sup>22</sup> 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.)

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

<sup>24</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

December 16<sup>th</sup>, 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.)<sup>25</sup>**

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~)<sup>26</sup>

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

<sup>26</sup> 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.*<sup>27</sup>

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.)<sup>28</sup> 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!<sup>29</sup>

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.

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<sup>27</sup> 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.

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

<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>*

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.<sup>32</sup> 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

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<sup>30</sup> 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...

<sup>31</sup> 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...

<sup>32</sup> 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?<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> We also realize that I'm Henry Amber. The same dude who got offed by Peck, the Swan Street Slicer, back in Paridon.<sup>35</sup> 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!<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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!<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>36</sup> 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!

<sup>37</sup> 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.)

<sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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?<sup>41</sup>

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!)<sup>42</sup> (Joël tu as manqué de quoi, mon pote!)

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<sup>40</sup> 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.

<sup>41</sup> 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...

<sup>42</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

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

**December 16<sup>th</sup>, 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.<sup>43</sup>

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

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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!

<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

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!<sup>46</sup> Hmm methinks Niles has been hiding things from us, eh Philippe?<sup>47</sup> 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.

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<sup>44</sup> The Sorcerer’s ring that Philippe wears.

<sup>45</sup> 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...

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

<sup>47</sup> 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 John<sup>48</sup>. 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.<sup>49</sup> 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.

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<sup>48</sup> *Shut-In* from session one.

<sup>49</sup> Info from way back during session three, *Within the Circle*.