

Dmitri Azikiwe

August 21, 2012

Here I am at the beginning of my second journal on Sunblind, and still Nicole has not bothered to put a single word to paper. Nor, to my knowledge, to screen, though she carries that infernal device everywhere. Yes, yes, call me a Luddite. But surely there is something to be said for the pen in worlds that are, in a very real sense, wrought from ink.

August 23

New sunglasses. I've caved. Blame Sharon; she caught me massaging my temples one time too many, and insisted. I admit all this squinting has begun to take its toll--the ache has kept me awake more nights than one--but I haven't worn sunglasses in thirty years.

I look preposterous.

August 24

How someone with so little interest in other cultures became involved with the DRC is beyond me. Nicole shows little interest in *anything* outside of the mechanical challenges she has been tasked to overcome. She reminds me of the engineering students who used to take my Intro to Anthropology classes, expecting easy liberal arts credits.

Were I a less dignified mind, this is the point at which I would cackle forebodingly.

August 27

Amazing how even in so small a space as this, one can learn so much about a wider society. Clues are everywhere. Take this game--Eyli, as the recording dubs it (and who am I to contradict *him*?). From chess one gleans lessons, however abstracted, of ancient warfare, at least in what we now call the Middle East, from whence the game emerged. I believe similar deductions might follow here.

(Drawing of Eyli board initial configuration.)

Consider the board itself, divided into three zones, between which only Kah, representing perhaps projectiles of some sort, may pass. The name for the center zone translates approximately to "Void," and is of course the region shared by both players. Though the D'ni were almost certainly the architects of this observation chamber, if the recordings are to be believed a native population once operated and perhaps modified its machinery, suggesting technological acumen. Perhaps this game, then, simulates a battle conducted from afar--between planets, even. Many Earth cultures have described the night sky as a void, not

inaccurately, I suppose--for what really is space but an emptiness? This might explain why the Labor is the only player-controlled piece (I specify in order to except the Kah) which may move more than one space with a single point of action; something to do with momentum when in a vacuum...

The Arak, that fragile piece whose destruction awards victory, seems most likely to represent an inanimate object, being incapable of independent motion... a religious artifact, perhaps, or power source? Then again, even in chess the ruler is among the least mobile... It could be that the Goa who move the Arak are representative of servants, tasked with bearing their lord or lady to safety...

I suspect, too, that what the D'ni considered one of the game's flaws may in fact be a deliberate lesson: The game, if not decided quickly, finds itself in stalemate more often than not, particularly when played by amateurs. This holds true of war, does it not, particularly of those fought at great distance? Likewise how easy it is for a player to sabotage himself, launching a Kah by Goa or Labor that accidentally destroys his or her own Arak. Friendly fire.

One mystery I've yet to solve: Why the emphasis on correct orientation of the pieces, when, from a gameplay perspective, only that of the Labor matters? And the Tsin, I suppose; either can be turned 90 degrees with one point of action, and can only move in the direction they face (if the Tsin's long axis can really be said to be 'facing' a direction). The others, though, must never be rotated, according to every native reference to the rules I've so far unearthed. A simple ritualistic practice--or something more? Another hidden lesson? One should always keep one's eyes on the enemy? I'm reaching, I know.

It occurs to me this format may appeal to Nicole, more so than traditional trappings of education... I must try to play a game with her tomorrow.

August 28

I'll be damned. She actually got this thing moving. My hat is off to you, Ms. Laroux.

August 30

Some additional data, now that we've been able to observe new portions of Sunblind:

Encountered additional avians, suggesting their nesting grounds are extensive, not isolated to the eastern mountains as previously believed.

Average temperature decreases as we move north, universally, suggesting the range of this apparatus does not extend below the world's equator.

Tree line appears to be approx. 1750 km, which Kemling tells me is consistent with desert regions on Earth.

Nicole is still working on repairing the retrieval arm so that we may sample the minerals, and perhaps flora, on the surface, as for all Mr. Eves's climbing prowess he is not able (or willing) to attempt a descent with proper collection paraphernalia. Still no success in changing the observation pod's orientation; Nicole seems convinced it was never designed to rotate. Our view from the window always points west... much like an Eyli piece, arbitrarily restricted to one direction.

Which reminds me--no luck engaging her in a game. Typical.

September 1

Nicole showed me her first entry. No, dear, I'm not.

September 4

The university wants me back for a lecture on anthroarchaeology. Consider it a sabbatical.

In the meantime I've concocted a little exercise for Nicole. If she wants to take this chamber anywhere else, she will first have to slow down and learn a thing or two.

Worry not, Sunblind. I'll be back soon enough.

September 18

Or perhaps I won't. Damn it, Nicole.

September 20

Having heard the whole story I see that I rushed to judgment. The situation could not have been prevented. Nicole and I have both petitioned the DRC to allow us to continue our work, we have our Relto books after all. For now, though, it seems they are choosing to err on the side of caution, as business-folk and politicians are wont to do.

I remain convinced that Sunblind still has secrets left to plumb, and feel a deep regret abandoning them. But at least I can abandon those cursed sunglasses.

And yesterday Nicole offered to buy me a drink. That's something, that's something...

Nicole Laroux

September 1, 2012

You wanted me to write something, here you go, I'm writing something. Happy now, old man?

September 2

Continue to have trouble with the arm. Seems to run on same principle as the nav and viewscreen but the sensors are damaged. Could force constant activation but as-is power only supplies one station at a time, would make movement impossible. Fiddlesticks.

Can't even get myself to swear properly in writing anymore. Joys of having a five-year-old.

September 3

Dmitri will NOT SHUT UP about that stupid game of his. If I have to hear one more time about how he thinks blah blah blah about the lower classes because the gosh darn Goa is the only piece that can more diagonally I'm going to punch him. Also ideas about space battle ridiculous. Have worked with this technology plenty now. It ain't NASA.

Will be requesting reassignment as soon as the retrieval arm is up and running.

Did manage to get the broken viewscreen interface hooked up to an old LCD monitor. Guess Laxman's orientation class on surface-D'ni interfaces actually came in handy.

September 5

Respite. Finally.

Will need another body to help activate controls while the professor is out. Kemling as always, but who else... Maybe I'll bring Sarah along, if Maintainers approve. Not supposed to have her this weekend but Quent wants to swap. Has a date. Joy. Anyway, would save me having to hire a babysitter. Don't know how I feel about Joan.

September 6

Oh you've got to be kidding me. Dmitri!

September 7

Kemling scrounged up some art supplies for Sarah to play with, bless him.

Ok. Let's think about this. Players take turns making three moves at a time, so... $5 \times 2 \times 3 = 30$ moves. I can do this.

So when the triangles (Goa?) move the square with the diamond, that counts as a move. They don't move with it, though. And the triangles can only move the square when one is adjacent to it, including diagonally. But can they also move it diagonally, since they themselves can move diagonally? They must, right? They must.

I could just get some bolt clippers.

Dmitri probably assumed I wouldn't let myself "cheat." Prick.

...I hate it when people know me too well

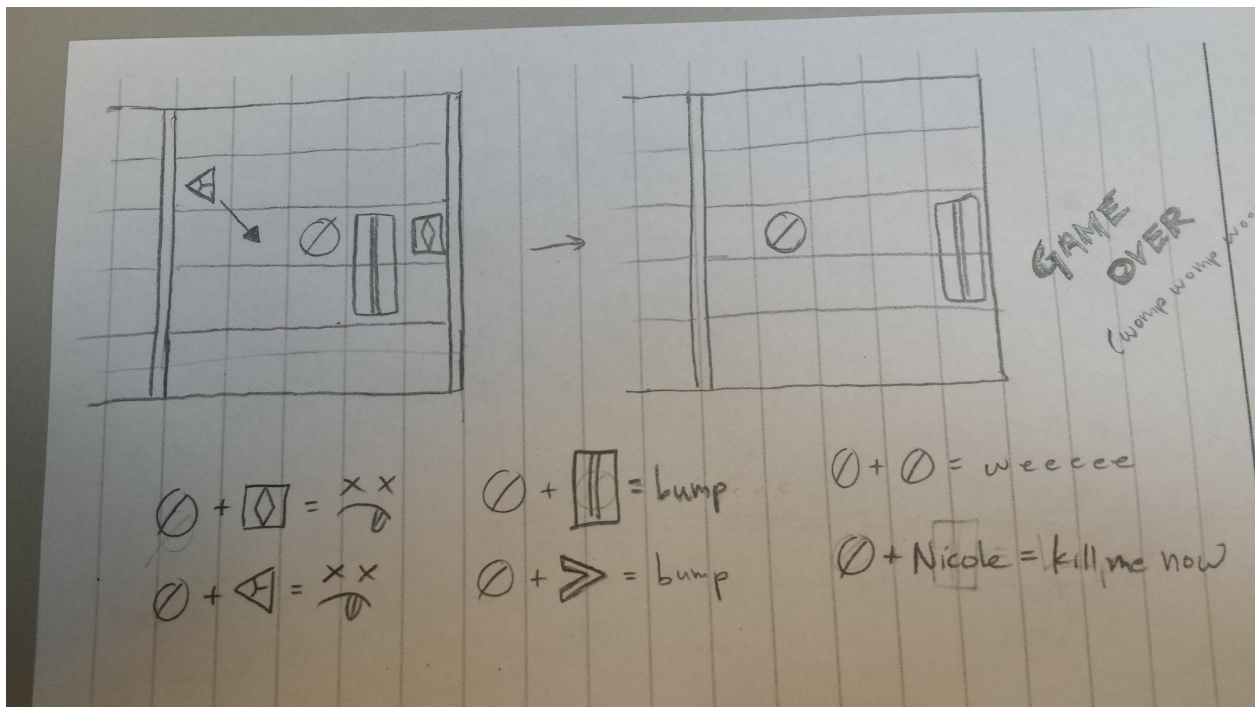
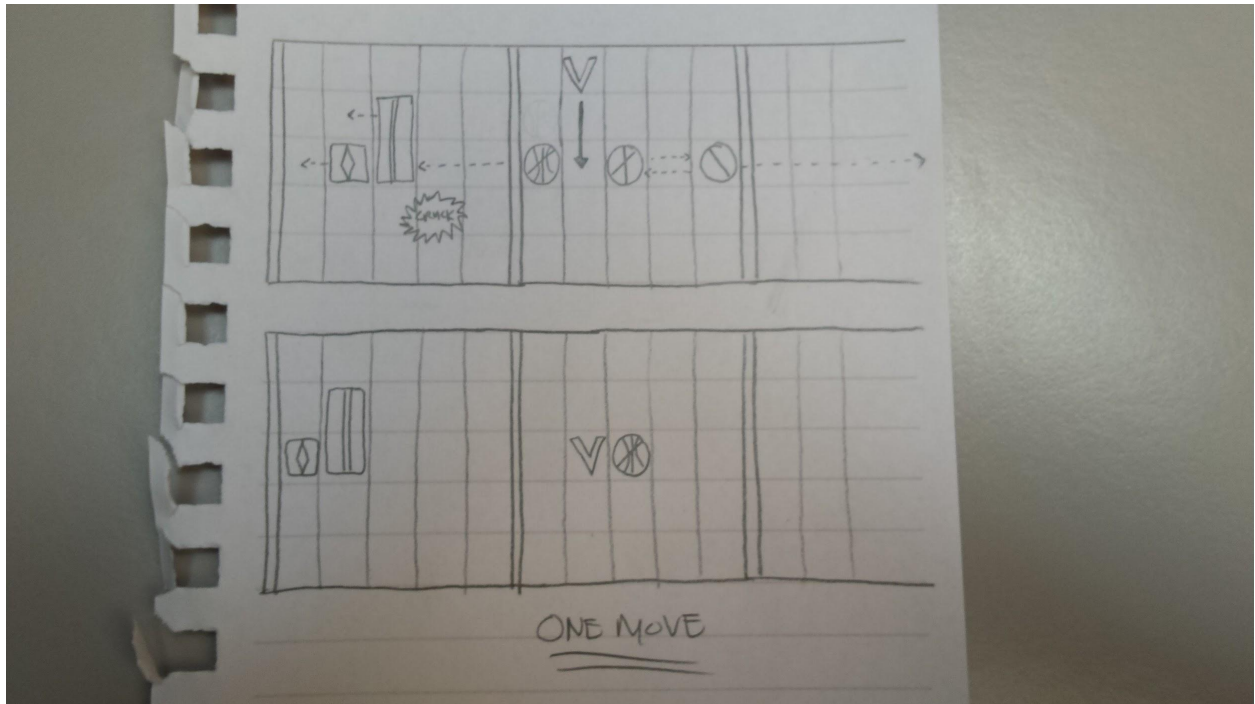
September 8

These gosh darned Kah! There just *had* to be two different kinds. I think the more complicated ones are the 'Fragile' Kah, or something? They apparently get flipped over when they hit something... but why are they called 'fragile'? Do they get destroyed the second time they hit something? I wish I could meet the D'ni who designed this.

Also realized I'd been playing as if everything could launch them, but I think only the triangle and the chevron can do that... and only when they are directly moved adjacent to the kah... and not diagonally... and all the collision stuff... I hate this game.

Was counting "launching" a Kah as a move, but it must just automatically happen, otherwise these clues are impossible.

(Two drawings of Kah being launched and the effect on hitting other pieces.)



In less frustrating news, Sarah seems to really dig this place. Likes watching the birds through the window, when it's not too bright.

September 9

How is playing this out supposed to help me, anyway. Argh.

Good news is I think I've come up with a solution for the arm. But need access to nav first; need to check something w/ power flow.

Seeing Eyli pieces on the back of my eyelids. Sarah's even started drawing them. Great.

September 10

GOT IT. EAT THAT, PROFESSOR.

pretty clever though

September 13

Is there an opposite to "When it rains it pours"? Like, when it shines, it blinds? (Light on my mind, go figure.)

Anyway the arm is working. I had to bypass the sensors using the manual control thing on the power console. But it's working.

September 17

Just about what passes for midday here. Bored. Sarah's drawing the view out the window again. More productive than me. All I've done today is write up some instructions for the arm, for when Dmitri gets back. Turnabout is fair play. I fig (*Text suddenly interrupted by a line/scribbles, as though the writer has been jerked during writing.*)

September 20

I am in some deep pocky.

Wrote a formal report but they want it in all records so... The avian hit the window in the middle of my last entry (duh). Still not sure what upset it. Clean break, one hit. Hurt itself more than it hurt the observation chamber, I think, but they haven't let me back in to confirm. Sarah was ok, thank god, but we lost some papers--worst of all the linking book back to Todelmer. Some other notes, my instructions for the arm, etc. Have the nav powered so I moved the chamber to get away from the creature and then we linked out to Relto. Sarah was pretty upset, no surprise.

I guess Kemling's been back to board up the window but otherwise they're locking the place down. Annoys me. I hate to leave a job unfinished. Weirdly, Dmitri's been my strongest ally trying to get back in. To no avail, but still.

Played a game of Eyli yesterday. He whooped me. But there'll be a rematch. I can be a quick study when I want to be.

Happy now, old man?

(He says yes.)