

## Rise of the Runelords Session Summary 12/02/2007

### Attendance

*Bruce* (Hulmar Benk) exclaims, “Look at this! It’s last week’s session summary! I made a map!” *Chris* (Roscoe Dillon) clucks and offers, “That’s very nice. Here, I’ll put it up on the refrigerator for you.” *Chuck* (Phiravno) adds, “Would you like a gold star? That’s very, very creative.” *Paul* examines it and notes, “But it’s not very detailed. And it totally doesn’t include the Eyelet.” The others shush him, as Bruce is starting to look rather put-out. He grumbles, “I hate you all...” *Ernest* (Valgrim Battlehorn) sits off to the side, chuckling.

*Patrick* (*Maru Maru*) walks in late exclaiming, “Hey guys! Whatever you do, don’t try buying lumber from the local *Home Depot*! Those guys are all crazy, and I mean mask-and-razor crazy!”

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Class &amp; Level</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Hulmar Benk	Bruce	Human	Scout 5	Chelaxian. Military veteran.
Roscoe Dillon	Chris	Human	Cleric 5	Shoanti, Skull tribe. Cleric of Gorum
Phiravno	Chuck	Human	Swordsage 2; Swashbuckler 2; Rogue 1	Varisian.
Artkel Certor	Ed	Human	Fighter 2	Shoanti, Spider clan.
<del>Prince Eyorak</del>	<del>Matt</del>	<del>Human</del>	<del>Rogue 2</del>	<del>Shoanti, Sun clan</del>
Apollo Eternium	Matt	Human	Fighter 4	Shoanti, Sun clan
Maru Maru	Patrick	Human	Monk 4	Shoanti, Sun clan
Valgrim Battlehorn	Ernest	Dwarf	Conjurer 3; Master Specialist 2	Fascinated by all manner of unusual creatures.

### The Sevens Mill

The characters review *Aldern Foxglove*’s books to learn that at midnight every Oathday he delivered a substantial amount of money to someone (cultists...) at the Sevens Mill. The characters quickly learn that the place is a lumbermill south of Mangimar, around the Eyelet. They are drawn to the place like moths to a flame.

*Valgrim Battlehorn* leads off by disguising himself as a different (but distinctive) dwarf and walking in and passing himself off as a customer. He finds that the place is clearly either a union shop or highly automated: there are machines running, but he can’t

find anybody around. He finds some stairs up to the second floor and follows them up. He goes to the second floor and starts poking around. He finds four workers inspecting lumber in a storeroom. He asks them to tell him where the manager is. They ask him to come over and sit down, and suggest that they will go find someone appropriate. He starts to feel less secure when they move to surround them. He also notices that several of them are picking up various small, concealed objects. He wonders, "Geez, what happens around here on a daily basis if people who just stop in off the street get murdered. I wonder if I look like a local Union-buster."

The four workers move into flanking positions. They pull out vicious war-razors and put on threatening facemasks. Valgrim cries, "I'm just trying to buy some lumber!"

He picks out the worker with the most teeth and pleads, "I'm here from the Sandpoint Carpenter's Guild and I'm looking to buy some lummm-ber..." They don't seem to care, so Valgrim casts *Glitterdust* on top of everyone and runs like crazy. The only one that isn't blinded misses his attack of opportunity, but does manage to slice him on the chase. Valgrim howls, "Ow! My back! I needed that!" The other skinsaw cultists stumble after him.

Valgrim thinks, "This is seriously the last time I'm going to go wandering off alone. If ever there was a time I needed a bruiser it would be now." He goes for the next best option and summons a celestial bison. The bison smashes down the one cultist that can see. The remainder stagger around blindly into the bison meatgrinder. The bison goes on to smash its way through the remaining cultists. Given its damage resistance, they actually have no chance to even hurt it on a standard hit. Fortunately, they're too kill-crazy to care.

Meanwhile outside, *Phiravno* idly picks his fingernails and offers, "Hey Hulmar, did you just hear a bison?" Hulmar shrugs and goes back to inspecting a small flaw in his shortsword blade.

Valgrim comes screaming out of the building with a cut on his face, howling something about crazy skinsaw cultists attacking him. *Roscoe Dillon* is confused, "They attacked you? But they don't even know you!"

The characters take this as a clear sign that it's time to clear the building.

Valgrim and the others return to the storeroom. He tries putting on one of the masks. He finds that his thoughts are immediately tangled with thoughts of death and murder. He finds that blood glows in his vision and he can smell fear (+2 on sense checks against any creature not immune to fear, and +1 to damage with slashing weapons, but it inflicts 1 point of Charisma damage when put on). Loot from the four dead cultists includes:

- 4 suits of leather armor;
- 4 masterwork war razors;
- 4 skinsaw masks; and
- 80 gold pieces

### **The Log-Splitter Room**

The characters move up to the next level and pick their way into the log-splitter room. Two huge water-powered log-splitters are thundering away on a pile of raw lumber. Four skinsaw cultists work here, carefully loading logs into the splitters.

*Maru Maru* opens the door. Valgrim calls out, “Hi! I’m looking for the management office so I can buy some lumber, but the last guys I ran into tried to jump me so I brought the brute squad this time!”

Oddly enough, one of the cultists actually talks to Valgrim, though nothing he says is helpful. When Roscoe and Hulmar move into the room the cultists go for their razors and masks. Phiravno intercepts one and slashes him down with his scarf. Hulmar Benk shudders as he watches severed bits of cultist meat hit the ground with a red splash. He tells Phiravno, “I’ll never get used to seeing you do that.”

Valgrim ignores the fragile-stomached scout as he summons a celestial fire beetle to irritate another cultist. The cultist looks back in annoyance, giving Maru Maru an opportunity to run up and belt him. Then the beetle feeds on him from behind. The others turn away when the beetle extends its ovipositor. The characters turn to looting:

- Four skinsaw masks;
- Four masterwork razors;
- Four suits of leather armor;
- 80 gold pieces; and

- Some other things

### **The Cultist High Justice**

While the characters loot, the log-splitter room doors slam open. More cultists swarm in, followed by a man in freaky looking robes and a mask that looks like it was sewn out of a spiral of human skin. Maru Maru knows that the man is dressed like a High Justice of Magnimar, except for the spiral human-skin mask. Roscoe feels relatively glad that he asked Hulmar Benk and Maru Maru to stand watch.

Maru Maru dodges underneath one of the cultists to move directly on the High Justice, but his strike is off-balance. The High Justice responds by casting a spell to *Confuse* most of the rest of the group.

The cultists move to flank Maru Maru, but he evades their strikes. Roscoe casts a *Prayer* to enhance everyone (except the cultists) and Hulmar exploits that to cut down a cultist. Maru Maru moves his attention to the High Justice, punching him across the ribs.

Phiravno launches his *Shadow Blade Technique* at the High Justice. The High Justice staggers under the impact of the strike, then complains, “I’m an elf! I’m immune to sleep!”

The *Confused* Valgrim attacks Roscoe, who responds by trying to *Dispel* the confusion effect. The spell proves too strong.

Hulmar decides that things have gone on long enough. He skirmishes in, gets a critical hit with a wide axe swing at the High Justice, and cuts the man in half. Roscoe comments, “Way to go, King Solomon.”

Maru attempts to grapple with the surviving cultist, but doesn’t manage to end him. Roscoe yells out, “He’s been bathing in pig oil! Take him out! Ravno! Put your scarf through his eye!” Phiravno obliges.

Meanwhile, Valgrim continues to attack Roscoe’s well-armored kneecaps. Maru Maru deals with the problem by pinning him until the spell expires. The additional loot includes:

- A mithril shirt;
- A *War Razor +1*;
- The *Reaper’s Mask*;

- A wand of *Cure Moderate Wounds* (12 charges);
- Two suits of leather armor;
- Two skinsaw masks;
- Two masterwork war razors; and
- forty gold pieces

The High Justice's *Reaper's Mask* gives the same benefits as a regular skinsaw mask. It also allows the wearer to cast *Confusion* twice per day. The characters continue to search, until they find a closet full of treasure:

- Twelve robes used by skinsaw cultists;
- Three bags of 100 gold pieces each;
- 3 potions of *Barkskin*;
- a beautiful crystal decanter set with an obsidian stopper (300 gold); and
- a tiny wooden box containing three poorly cut diamonds worth 200 gold pieces each

The characters box up the goods and make a point of ensuring that everyone has a skinsaw robe in the event that they might need to disguise themselves later on.

### **The Workshop**

The characters proceed on up the stairs to a workshop. The floor is covered in sawdust up to a foot deep. The workbenches are covered with a random array of tools. There's nothing of value in the workshop, but beyond it is an office decorated with a macabre array of preserved human faces, each bearing an expression of pain. The characters find several oddments collected from the skinsaws' victims. Notable items include:

- An array of sea charts;
- A painting of a strange city built entirely of ice.
- A wizard's spellbook containing all cantrips, *Blink*, *Cat's Grace*, *Chill Touch*, *Enlarge Person*, *Fox's Cunning*, *Grease*, *Haste*, *Lightning Bolt*, *Mage Armor*, *Magic Missile*, *Scorching Ray*, *Shocking Grasp*, *Shrink Item*, *Spider Climb*, and *Web*

- A filigreed and illustrated book titled *The Syrpent's Tane: Faery Tales of the Eldest*.
- A slim volume that served as both ledger and journal for *Justice Ironbriar*, all written in a cipher, perhaps based upon Infernal.

### **The Rookery**

The characters move up through a trapdoor into a rookery. They find three caged ravens plus a variety of writing equipment that makes it obvious that the cultists were using the ravens to send messages.

Valgrim decides he'd like to see where the ravens go. He lets one out of its cage. It flies north very fast. Phiravno and Hulmar both send ill-aimed arrows in its direction, but it flies free.

### **The Basement**

There are some cultists down in the basement. The characters take two of them out, capture the third, then collect the loot:

- Three suits of leather armor;
- Three masterwork war razors;
- Three skinsaw masks; and
- Sixty gold pieces.

Valgrim manages to cast *Control Person* on the captive to make him easier to interrogate. Then the questions start.

- *What's up, cult-bitch? You're friends of the cause?*
- *Yes, that's why we just killed everyone in the building. Besides, don't you see the Charisma damage from wearing one of those masks? Yeah, we're from the branch office in Sandpoint. Anyhow, who's the boss of the local boss? Ironbriar receives his instructions directly from Norgorber, God of Greed, Poison, Secrets and Murder. He is the leader, he receives visions.*
- *Where do the ravens go? Ironbriar has some sort of relationship with that vamp from the clock tower, some woman. She's at the Shadow Clock, underneath the Irespan Bridge.*

- *So we're on with the plans to murder all the greedy people, right? That's what we're up to, right?* Right (Roscoe breaks into laughter).
- *Who are the rest of the Brotherhood of Seven?* I don't know what you're talking about.
- *How about the Seven Mill?* Not ringing any bells.
- *You have any activities coming up? Any murders or conventions?* Well, there is the Cotillion.
- *How long have you been a member?* Five years. Five glorious years of murdering people!
- *Do you people have another clubhouse around here?* No, this is the only chapter that I know about.
- *Is this a real business? Do you people actually sell wood?* Yes, this is my day job.
- *You guys have a really amazing work ethic. Most cultists are just all about the murdering. Are you literate?* Yes.
- *Would you mind writing a lengthy diatribe about the cult's activities here?* Oh, sure! If you want to come to my house I have a stack of them already written!
- *I'm sure the investigators will be happy to discover those on their own.*

### *The Shadow Clock*

The characters drop off their loot and head to the Shadow Clock. The decrepit and sagging clock tower stands near one of the massive supports of the Irespan. The structure reaches up a rickety one hundred feet. Scaffolding surrounds a section of the upper tower that has fallen away.

Valgrim says, "We have two ways to approach! We could climb the stairs, or rappel down from the Irespan!"

The others respond in unison, "We take the stairs."

Valgrim curses, "Feebs."

The air inside the tower is dusty and dry. Piles of rubble and plaster sit upon the floors. A wooden stair winds up into the darkness of the tower. Maru Maru takes a stick and pokes at the rubble. A misshapen monster sewn together from body parts lurches up,

made more of cow and horse than man. Its face is cruelly stitched together. The whole thing is dressed as a scarecrow and armed with a scythe. A trio of horribly-bloated human heads hangs from its belt.

It swings at Maru Maru and cuts him deeply with its scythe. Maru Maru staggers back. Roscoe quickly matches that with a *Close Wounds* spell and Hulmar runs to strike the creature with his axe. He notices that the creature is only barely affected by an otherwise very solid axe hit. As Maru Maru retreats to heal himself, Valgrim casts *Grease* to knock down the mongrel scarecrow and then *Enlarge* to make Hulmar crazy big.

Hulmar and Phiravno commence hammering on the creature. The creature savages Phiravno. In return, Hulmar smashes it to pieces. The creature proves to have very disappointing loot:

- A large scythe;
- A cloak

The characters move carefully up the stairs. Maru Maru leads, followed by Hulmar at a distance, and then the others. The stairs are rotten and unsteady. Roscoe complains, “I fucking hate this place!” Everyone with Balance skill mocks him.

From above, Maru Maru hears the sounds of rope snapping and timber splintering. The giant bronze bells above start to give way and fall. Maru Maru is struck, but manages to hold on to the staircase. Phiravno is also struck, costing him most of his recently-regained hit points.

Maru Maru looks up and sees three faceless stalkers staring down at him. He reports this. Roscoe yells at him, “Describe them! Do they look like the ones we fought before? Are they familiar?” The other characters conclude that Roscoe is on crack.

Valgrim summons two howler wasps and sends them up to attack the faceless stalkers while Maru Maru clammers up the collapsing stairs. The faceless stalkers make swift work of the wasps, then brandish their longswords at the monk. Maru screams down, “They have longswords this time! Longswords!”

Phiravno joins Maru Maru, hoping to draw some of the heat from the monk. He attempts to use his *Shadow Blade Technique*, but the faceless stalkers evade the attack.

The stalkers move to mob Maru Maru, who evades their attacks by the thinnest of margins.

Phiravno lashes out with his scarf at one stalker, lightly wounding it. He yells out, "Get up to the top of the stairs, guys! We need you!" As he yells, the stalkers do their best to cut Maru Maru apart. Maru Maru falls.

Valgrim arrives on the scene and summons a rat swarm. Phiravno tumbles across the battlefield and executes an elegant scarf strike to leave a faceless stalker staggered. It attempts to run; Phiravno strikes it down as it does.

The two surviving stalkers flank Roscoe and give him such a stabbing. Roscoe staggers but remains standing. Hulmar moves in to critically injure one of the stalkers as Roscoe casts *Cure Moderate Wounds* on Maru Maru, in spite of his own crippling wounds.

The wounded faceless stalker attempts a retreat up to the roof, but Phiravno cuts it down in mid-step. The other cuts Roscoe open. Roscoe falls dead, then calls on the power of his nearly-forgotten *Siheeron Medallion* to keep some shred of life in his body. Hulmar stuffs a potion of *Cure Moderate Wounds* down his throat to bring him back. While the characters work to bring their cleric back, the remaining faceless stalker flees up the stairs.

The characters pause in their advance to heal their various gaping wounds. Roscoe burns through almost all of his available power. Restored, the characters move up.

### **The Top of the Tower**

The characters find a room with a rookery and a single raven. Valgrim recognizes it as the raven he let free. The characters continue up to the roof, drinking *Barkskin* potions on the way.

The characters reach the roof to find that it is *Silent*. The only things the characters see are the statue of the angel and the cowering faceless stalker. Hulmar moves over to execute the faceless stalker. The carcass falls from the tower.

On further investigation, the characters find that amid the filth and grime there is a nest of ratted silk cushions on one corner, overlooking the distant rooftops of the Shadow.

A large demonic female figure with red skin appears flying off the edge of the tower. Roscoe responds by running downstairs. Valgrim calls out, "It's not real! It's nothing but an illusion!" Nobody hears him because of the *Silence*. In an effort to communicate, he flings an *Acid Orb* onto the silk cushions. Then he moves down the stairwell.

And then *Xanesha* appears. She is floating off the top of the tower as well. Her upper half is that of a woman, but her lower half is that of a cobra. She wears a mask of gold. And to top it off, she also has *Mirror Image* going, plus a wide variety of other defensive spells. She gazes at Phiravno; he momentarily feels stiffened but shakes it off.

Valgrim summons a celestial hippogriff and orders it to carry Phiravno into combat. Phiravno looks at the thing and decides that yes, he is that crazy.

Xanesha changes that tactical choice when she swoops in and stabs Phiravno, inflicting both damage and WIS drain. Phiravno curses as his armor class drains away. Roscoe sends a *Searing Light* at her, missing.

Xanesha lashes out with her spear. She stabs Phiravno through, twice. She downs him, then moves to stabbing Hulmar. Hulmar swings back, gets a pair of impressive hits, and doesn't manage to pierce her defenses. He (soundlessly) yells out, "Run!"

From downstairs, Valgrim casts a *Cloud of Bewilderment* all around her. She moves to the side and stabs Maru Maru. The monk groans, but the *Silence* effect prevents the others from hearing. Roscoe drags Phiravno downstairs and feeds him a *Cure Moderate Wounds* potion. Phiravno puts on the *Stalker Mask* and prepares to go back into the fray, magically fueled by his rage and his jealousy of her appearance. Roscoe warns him, "You stay down here, I'm not healing your ass again..."

Hulmar and Maru escape down the stairs as quickly as they can.

Xanesha follows them down. She stabs Maru Maru and he goes down for the count. Phiravno responds with a *Shadow Hand Strike* that goes wide. Hulmar moves in

and swings twice against her, missing both times. He moans, “This is not happening! This is not happening!”

Valgrim sends an *Acid Breath* spray at Xanesha. She barely notices, but she does conclude that he is the biggest threat she faces. She moves on him and downs him with two spear thrusts, then jabs Hulmar with her third strike.

Roscoe decides that he’s going to tap out. He drags Valgrim down the rickety stairs, up to the point where the bell severed the stairs. At that point, he recognizes that he has little chance but to climb. Phiravno tumbles off in *Child of Shadows* stance. Hulmar grabs Maru Maru and goes for the hippogriff. Xanesha flies after them, but the hippogriff easily outdistances her. Hulmar lands and hides himself and Maru Maru.

The characters spend the rest of the day hiding from a flying invisible demon. They eventually reunite to bind their wounds and move to a different inn.

### *The End of the Session*

Each character gains 3700 experience points. This is sufficient to bring everyone except Valgrim to 6<sup>th</sup> level. Hulmar exults in his new Scout level.