

Rise of the Runelords Session Summary 12/16/2007

Attendance

Paul asks, “Do you think that we’ll still be sitting around here playing this game in ten years?” *Bruce* (Hulmar Benk) offers, “Well, my life isn’t going anywhere, so I’ll probably be here.” *Chris* (Roscoe Dillon) complains, “Yeah, by then Fourth Edition will probably be out, and someone will have bought the rules and wet themselves in excitement.” *Bruce* promises, “I’ll buy the books, but I promise I won’t wet myself.” *Chuck* (Phiravno) promises, “I’ll just wet myself. By that time, I might not have a choice.” *Ernest* (Valgrim Battlehorn) suggests, “You won’t need to worry about the books; I’ll pirate them from somewhere and hand out soft-copies. Aaargh!” *Patrick* (Maru Maru) holds his ears and moans, “Lalalalala! I can’t heear you!”

Matt (Apollo Eternium) walks in somewhat later, completely unaware of the recent controversy.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Class & Level</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Hulmar Benk	Bruce	Human	Scout 6	Chelaxian. Military veteran.
Roscoe Dillon	Chris	Human	Cleric 6	Shoanti, Skull tribe. Cleric of Gorum
Phiravno	Chuck	Human	Swordsage 2; Swashbuckler 2; Rogue 2	Varisian.
Artkel Certor	Ed	Human	Fighter 2	Shoanti, Spider clan.
Prince Eyorak	Matt	Human	Rogue 2	Shoanti, Sun clan
Apollo Eternium	Matt	Human	Fighter 4	Shoanti, Sun clan
Maru Maru	Patrick	Human	Monk 5, Tattooed Monk 1	Shoanti, Sun clan
Valgrim Battlehorn	Ernest	Dwarf	Conjurer 3; Master Specialist 2	Fascinated by all manner of unusual creatures.

We Are All Hurt and Injured

The characters are all in various states of injured thanks to their recent encounter with *Xanasha* the sorcerous naga-thing on the Shadow Tower. Loudest in their complaints are *Maru Maru* and *Phiravno*, both of whom have suffered Wisdom drain. *Roscoe Dillon* examines them and concludes, “You’re going to need to visit a church, boys...”

After a couple of ill-considered comments about exacting revenge, sanity prevails and the characters decide not to hunt Xanesha down right away.

The High Justice's Journal

Valgrim Battlehorn finds a translator to translate *High Justice Ironbriar's* ciphered journal. He learns that the life of a High Justice of Magnimar is fairly harrowing, including the occasional politically-motivated killing. Unfortunately, at some point he started to hear a voice in his head who claimed to be *Father Skinsaw* and told him to kill specific people. He founded the Skinsaw Men organization to carry out these killings. Then he met Xanesha, and at that point he went way off the edge. He started to follow her commands, rather than those of the voice in his head. That is the point when the Skinsaw Men started killing people with greed in their souls. Valgrim concludes that Xanesha probably put a magical charm upon him. The two of them were targeting a fair number of local nobles and high rollers. The last few pages of the journal offer an interesting tidbit: she intends to kill the *Lord Mayor Haldemar Grobaris of Magnimar* at a brothel he frequents.

Roscoe Dillon opines that Father Skinsaw is probably an aspect of *Norgorber*, the god of greed, secrets, poison and murder.

The characters discuss their options. *Hulmar Benk* points out that Xanesha pretty much destroyed the characters in detail in their last encounter. Roscoe Dillon suggests that this was in part because she had lots of time to prepare, whereas the characters walked into the fight piecemeal with few spells left.

Phiravno notes that Lord Mayor Grobaris is quite foppish and somewhat useless, but also silver-tongued and extremely personally wealthy. He is fond of encouraging a certain level of corruption, and would be far less capable without the service of his quiet secretary.

The Tane

Valgrim Battlehorn remembers that he has a variety of additional books taken from the High Justice's quarters. One of them details the *Tane*, a group of ancient fae with many of the aspects of the Elder Gods.

Dividing up the Loot

Each character gains 100 gold pieces in cash and another 857 gold pieces from sold loot. The characters determine that the scarecrow-headed construct was wearing a *Cloak of Elvenkind*; Phiravno picks it up on a roll-off.

Foiling the Lord Mayor's Assassination

The characters investigate the Lord Mayor's favorite brothel, *Dante's Cove*. They learn several things about the place:

- Normal cost is 10 gold per hour, or 40 gold for a night;
- *Sleazy Michelle* offers a two-for-one special;
- The Lord Mayor is planning on “breaking in” the new girl tomorrow night;
- There is a “executive lounge” in back that looks a lot like a storeroom; and
- There is a back entrance. Ahem.

Maru Maru asks a lot of questions on whether or not he can get a discount for being immune to disease. He doesn't.

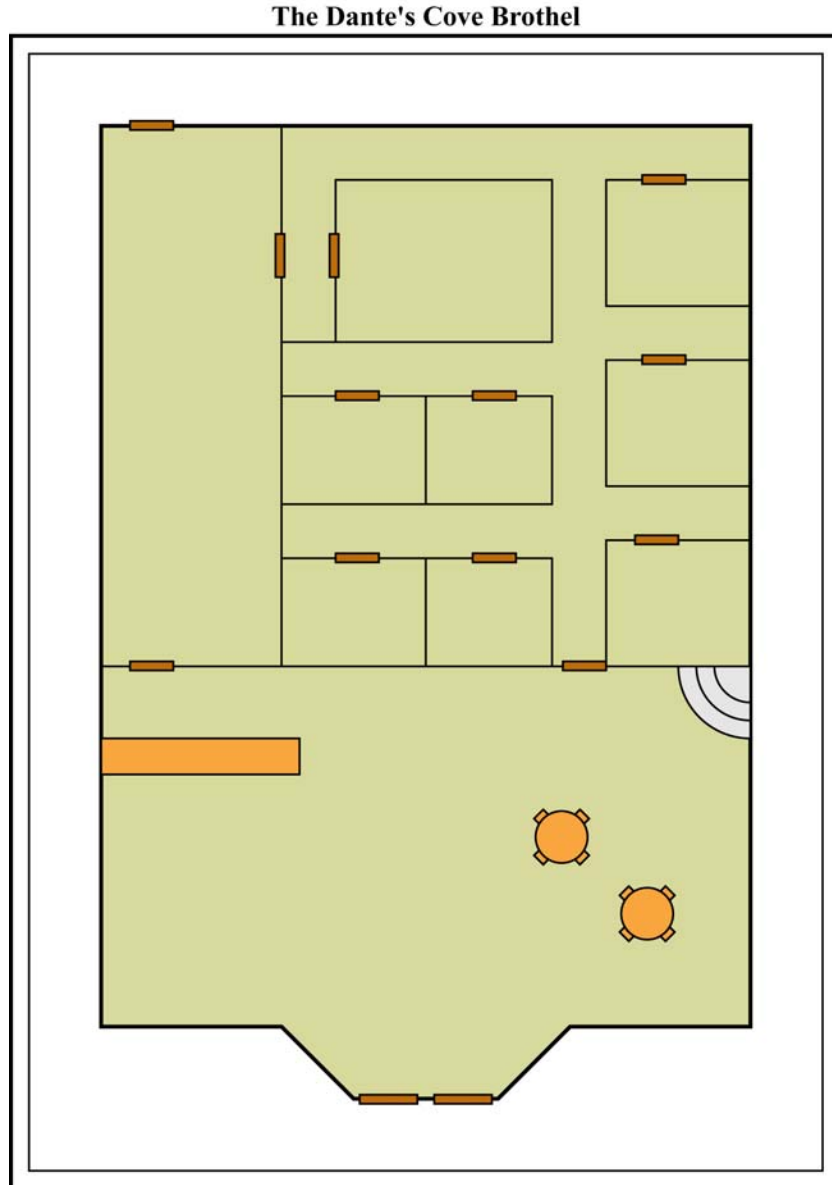
The Clever Plan

The characters come up with a clever and detailed plan that puts Phiravno and Valgrim hiding out behind the building (watching for the Lord Mayor's arrival) in back, Maru Maru and Roscoe Dillon in two of the “companionship” rooms, and Hulmar Benk sitting around in the lobby drinking as if he were an out-of-work soldier.

The Clever Execution

The first problem with the plan is when the Lord Mayor spots Valgrim behind the building and has a couple of goons sent out to deal with him. Valgrim gives them the slip while Phiravno takes the opportunity to sneak into the building. Valgrim comes in from the front, warns Hulmar, then the two of them warn the others that the game is afoot.

The characters assemble in front of the Lord Mayor's room and start casting spells. This does nothing at all to impress the various prostitutes in the building, most of whom (correctly) deduce that the characters mean to create a large disturbance. Then Valgrim summons up a mirror-skinned varut that banishes any doubt they might have had.



Phiravno and Hulmar Benk listen at the door. They first hear the sounds of naughtiness, then some spellcasting, and then the sounds of the “new girl” making ready to subject the Lord Mayor to the sihedron ritual. The characters pick that moment to storm in.

They find that Xanasha has the Lord Mayor strapped down on the floor. Characters rush all around her as *Apollo Eternium* howls, “I recognize you! You’re the woman who killed my brother!” Phiravno strikes and learns that she’s already got her *Mage Armor* and *Shield* spells up. Maru Maru attacks and learns the exact same thing. Then Valgrim and Roscoe open up with the spells. Valgrim’s *Haste* boosts everyone

while Roscoe's *Dispel Magic* strips off Xanesha's *Shield*. Hulmar takes advantage of this and cuts her, albeit not deeply.

Xanesha activates her *Sirhadron Medallion* to give herself *False Life*. Then she stabs Phiravno three times, leaving him gasping through three sucking chest wounds. Roscoe Dillon reflexively casts *Close Wounds*, bringing him back up.

Apollo Eternium strikes at her spear, hoping to sunder it. He manages to put a sizable cut in the haft, but does not destroy it. Everyone celebrates because they managed to use a new and complicated set of rules today.

Roscoe's second *Dispel Magic* takes out both Xanesha's *Mage Armor* and *False Life*. Phiravno cheers through his bloody teeth, slashes her with his scarf, then tumbles out of range. Xanesha turns to Apollo Eternium and repeats her earlier performance. Apollo's limp carcass leaves a bloody mark on the wall. Roscoe uses his last *Close Wounds* effect to keep him alive.

Valgrim Battlehorn summons a fiendish dire ape directly on the bed. The Lord Mayor seems pleased. Valgrim shudders.

Apollo Eternium rather desperately attempts to withdraw in the face of life-threatening injuries. Valgrim covers him by casting *Enlarge Person* on Hulmar and then watching as Hulmar howls, "I love being large!" and sends Xanesha spinning.

Xanesha turns to Hulmar and stabs him three times. Hulmar grumbles, "Yaaargh. I'm still standing. Barely."

Valgrim summons up a monstrous spider to complete his menagerie. He instructs the others that the spider's name is *Ploooosh*. Ploooosh splooges out a pile of webbing that Xanesha evades.

Hulmar comes lunging in with his axe. Xanesha weaves back, allowing Phiravno to cut across her with his scarf. Xanesha decides that this would be the time to step out: she casts *Dimension Door* and walks off into the next county.

Clearing Things with the Lord Mayor

The brothel guards descend upon the characters moments after Xanesha steps out. The characters have a few dicey moments being brutalized by the guards before the Mayor's assistant shows up, asks the characters to appear at the Mayoral Palace for

dinner tomorrow, and assures them that the Mayor's schedule will be adjusted to make him less vulnerable.

The Mayor's Banquet

The Lord Mayor receives the characters in his garden. The place is right on the cliff and enjoys a beautiful view of half of Magnimar. A tower loaded with guards watches over the place.

The Lord Mayor eats hugely of the various exotic foods on the table, paying only minimal attention to the various documents his assistant hands him. It is clear that the assistant is completely in charge.

Towards the end of the meal, the Lord Mayor thanks the characters for their various actions and offers them a unique "opportunity". There is a keep called *Fort Rannick* built to repel giant attacks from the mountains. The rangers at the keep have not been particularly communicative, so the Lord Mayor wants to send someone to investigate and (if needed) take over stewardship of the keep. The *Order of the Black Arrows* is supposed to have custodianship of the place, and he wants to know what has happened to them. He will provide traveling money, 300 gold pieces per character.

Fort Rannick is far up the *Shimmerglens River*. River passage costs 50 gold each, and takes seven days. The characters spend some time shopping then head out. Roscoe Dillon writes a nice letter to his lady-love *Shaelis Vinder* in Sandpoint, then sends it to her with a nice gift. Then he buys himself a silver morningstar. Hulmar Benk buys himself twenty days' preserved rations, five bottles of nice wine, an extra potion of *Cure Moderate Wounds* and a big sack to put it all in.

Down the River

Shalelu Andosana the elf goblin-killer shows up on the docks as the characters are embarking. "I heard that you're heading to Fort Rannick. I have business with one of the rangers there, and I'd like to travel with you." The characters agree.

Along the way, Shalelu tells the characters that Fort Rannick is a pretty hard-core outpost. Most folk sent there go because their alternative is prison. The garrison is known for a high level of discipline as the rangers take whatever they are sent and turn out trained soldiers. They have a reputation for dealing the discipline problems sternly,

with floggings, exile and execution all on the menu. The Order of the Black Arrow is also quite secretive. Their major responsibility is to patrol the Storval Rise and prevent giant incursions. They have held the fortress for forty-five years.

The only event of note along the trip is a brief encounter with a massive *nightbelly boa constrictor* sunning itself on the bank. The characters note that it is longer than the boat.

The characters' boat crosses Claybottom Lake to arrive at Turtleback Ferry, a smallish community of 400-ish folk. The town gets its name from the three distinctive ferries it operates, each constructed from the shell of a massive turtle. The locals can't wait to tell the characters the story of how one of the town's founders killed the three turtles. The characters are more interested with the fact that it is getting close to winter so the weather is cold and rainy.

The locals also say that there has been no contact from the Black Arrows for several weeks, ever since the rains began. Normally, one of them would stop by every couple of days. They also say that the *Kriegwood* has become much more dangerous recently: various predators have come closer to the edges of the woods. Local hunters think that the beasts are being forced out by increased ogre activity. A patrol sent out a week ago to contact the fort has not been heard from.

The characters spend two days in Turtleback Ferry. While staying there, Maru Maru sees a seven-pointed sirhedran rune tattooed on a worker's arm. Hulmar Benk sees another one tattooed on a washer-woman's back. Phiravno and Maru Maru decide to ask the worker about it. Hulmar predicts the way this is going to go, and makes sure that everything the group needs to hit the trail to Fort Rennick is ready.

When asked, the worker denies everything and suggests that the characters are seeing things. Surprisingly, violence does not ensue.

Over the Bridge and Into the Wilderness

The next morning the characters head out towards the fort. They're crossing the Old Wooden Bridge when they hear a muffled cry of pain off in the woods. The characters find a black bear stuck in a bear trap. He becomes excited as he sees the characters.

Apollo Eternium easily determines that this is a very well-trained animal, perhaps a druid or ranger's animal companion. He frees the bear from the trap just in time to hear the hounds. The characters disperse to meet them.

A few moments later, five massive dogs rampage out of the woods. The characters make fairly fast work of them. Following on the heels of the dogs is a huge subhuman creature. The fingers of one hand are fused into one appendage. It carries a spear in the other hand. It howls, "I wuz huntin' bear! No concern of yers less'n you wanna be hunted too!"

Apollo Eternium charges the creature. It stabs him. He stabs it. Phiravno and Hulmar help out, wounding the creature horribly. The creature starts to howl like a baby, "Ahh wuz just huntin' bears! Mama! Mama! Help me!" He runs into the woods. Shalelu takes a shot at him, dropping him. He is carrying:

- A *Spear +1* (Hulmar claims it);
- A *Belt of Giant Strength +2* (Roscoe claims it); and
- A ratty blanket marked with Black Arrow Order symbols

After some debate on whether or not to kill the creature, Apollo Eternium deals with the situation by simply killing the thing. Once the creature is dead, the now-freed bear attempts to communicate with him. It leads them along the path the hunting creature followed.

The Hillbilly Farm

A half-mile along, the characters come upon a poorly-maintained farmstead. The house is half-collapsed and the corn in the fields is randomly planted. Hulmar tells the others, "You see how they have planted corn, beans and squash in the same field? This is the work of savages who deserve nothing better than death!" The others think that the scout is being a bit overzealous until they realize that the wind chimes on the house are made from human bones.

Then the characters see another misshapen creature stalking the perimeter of the fields. *Crowfood* is armed with a massive hook. "What you doin' here, boy?" He lumbers to the attack, charging down Maru Maru and howling, "I am Crowfood!" Maru Maru evades and notices that Crowfood is armed with an ogre hook.

Phiravno moves in from the side and unleashes his *Burning Blade*, delivering a devastating strike. Crowfood staggers. Maru Maru hits him twice more. Crowfood collapses to the ground. He is carrying:

- An *Ogre Hook +1* (which goes into the pack);
- A *Ring of Protection +1* (Valgrim claims it); and
- A magical amulet

The characters move carefully towards the barn. They find three mutants, one of them a no-necked brute with a vestigial arm and a dented head wearing a dress with a faded floral pattern. His companions include a pale-skinned mountain with milky eyes and a stunted (five-foot) creature with twisted legs. The characters notice that one of the creatures was in the act of unbuckling its belt while the one in the dress leaned up against the wall.

Roscoe Dillon tells the others, “I suggest we just leave and drink this memory away.” Valgrim Battlehorn offers to cast some good area-effect spells instead. But before he can Hulmar and Apollo rush in to the attack. Phiravno follows them in to hit the pale mutant with a *Burning Blade* that leaves it on the ground. The others pile on in and deal with the remaining mutants in detail.

The characters quickly figure out that the center of the house is barred, but has an elevated walkway. They move onto the walkway and look down to see that a web-clogged tunnel leads into the ground. A series of manacles are attached to the walls; three sets are occupied by emaciated, unconscious men. Maru Maru and Apollo Eternium go to rescue them. Hulmar Benk stands up on the walkway with his bow, waiting for the giant spider to show up.

Right on schedule, the spider shows up to consume someone. It is fantastically huge. Hulmar shoots an arrow into it. It responds by trying to consume Phiravno whole. Maru Maru leaps at it, and it knocks him aside with a casual wave of a leg. Maru Maru falls into the webbing and is entangled. It follows up by biting Phiravno. Phiravno feels spider venom sapping his strength. Hulmar’s archery and Maru Maru’s martial arts put the spider to the end.

The Incapacitated Rangers

Roscoe Dillon examines the three captives. One ranger is older, with an eyepatch. The second is massive and dark-skinned. The third is younger. He casts *Mass Lesser Vigor* on them and on the various wounded characters.

When the rangers recover, the elder introduces himself as *Jakardros*; the bear is his animal companion. He expresses his gratitude and explains that he was the second-in-command at Fort Rannick for many years. But now, the fort has been taken and the garrison killed. Ogres run the place now. He and his men were out on patrol when the attack occurred, but from what he was able to see it looked like the ogres had full knowledge of the defenses before their attack. And after an abortive attempt to retake the fortress, the patrol survivors were captured by the *Grals*, the degenerate half-breed ogres the characters just killed.

When the characters bring him out, Shalelu confronts Jakardros. After a moment, a glint of recognition creeps into his eyes and he breaks down into sobs. Roscoe Dillon suggests, "Please avoid making the prisoners cry..." It comes out that she is his step-daughter, as he was her mother's lover for years.

The dead spider looks to have been hand-fed by the ogres. There are lots of bones in the pit: deer, pigs, gnomes, and other animals.

Valgrim announces that he's just found a still full of something horrible in the side of the barn. He kicks it over and sets the building on fire. Everyone runs.

Shirt Check, Gentlemen

Valgrim orders the three rangers to remove their shirts for a tattoo check. The youngest ranger has a sirhedran tattoo. The characters are all set to execute him when he explains that he got the tattoo on *Paradise*, a river barge that had been converted into a bar. The characters' dreams of burning the thing down are for nothing: it's already burnt. The lovely *Lady Lucretia* gave him the tattoo to show that he was a regular and could enter without paying a fee. He claims that very few patrons had such tattoos. The characters pull a description of Lady Lucretia out of him and conclude that she sounds very similar to Xanesha.

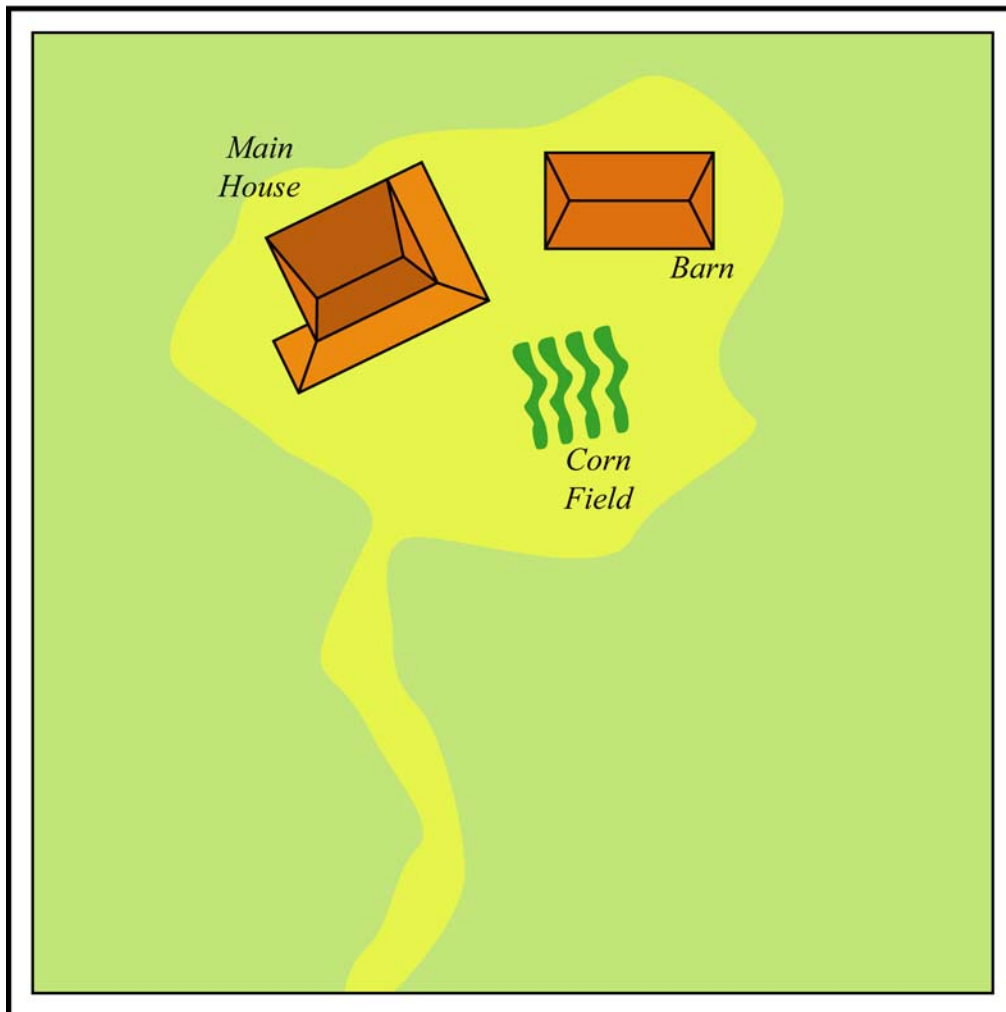
The characters decide that they're going to refrain from arming the young ranger until they're satisfied that he's not the traitor responsible for the fall of Fort Rannick.

Attacking the Main House

Hulmar Benk scouts the main house. He reports that the Grals are mostly using the side door, which suggests that the front door is trapped. Valgrim summons a celestial monkey up to knock on the front door. Spikes swing down from the sides while sawblades come up through the gaps between the planks on the porch. Monkey gibbets fly everywhere. The characters decide to use the side door.

Phiravno leads the way into the side door. He enters a kitchen displaying the sort of fastidiousness that the characters have come to associate with mutant hillbilly ogres. Roscoe moves through to the dining room, taking a hit from a scythe trap on the way. The dining table is decorated with what appears to be a severed ranger's head.

The Gral Homestead



The characters continue picking their way through the house until they find two more monstrous hillbilly ogre creatures, possibly children of some kind. Roscoe Dillon wastes valuable killing time speculating upon what manner of horror might have spawned these horrible creatures. Phiravno and Hulmar don't fret about the problem too much: they move forward to execute the creatures. Shalelu helps.

The End of the Session

Fourth-level characters gain 4650 experience points. Fifth level characters gain 4375 experience points. Sixth level characters gain 3650 experience points. Valgrim Battlehorn takes a level of Paragnostic Apostle, for reasons that only he understands.

There will be no gaming next Friday or Sunday. The following Sunday will be Gamer Christmas, and feature gaming as normal.