

## Rise of the Runelords Session Summary 06/01/2008

### Attendance

*Chuck* (Phiravno) offers up, “Just so you all know, the safe-word is ‘poodle’. You remember that.” *Bruce* (Yenneck Grumman) howls out, “Before we begin, let me just say ‘Poodle! Poodle poodle poodle!’” *Ernest* (Valgrim Battlehorn) scoffs, “You’re just like those folks in *European Vacation* who didn’t want to be violated with mechanical devices in Eastern Europe.” *Chris* (Roscoe Dillon) offers, “Just to change the subject, they say that there’s a labor shortage in Eastern Europe and the Pacific Rim these days.” *Paul* muses, “Oh, to have back the beautiful times when the dollar was worth something and Americans could have their way with white people behind the Iron Curtain...”

*Patrick* (Maru Maru) chooses this moment to walk in. He notices the expressions on everyone’s faces and thinks, “I guess I just walked in on one of *those* conversations again. Why does this happen every week, anyway?” *Matt* (Vaelyn) shows up later but doesn’t seem to notice anything out of place.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Class &amp; Level</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Yenneck Grumman	Bruce	Human	Ranger 9, Warblade 2	Another Chelaxian, a Black Arrow
Roscoe Dillon	Chris	Human	Cleric 10, Warblade 1	Shoanti, Skull tribe. Cleric of Gorum
Phiravno	Chuck	Human	Swordsage 5; Swashbuckler 3; Rogue 3	Varisian. Recently killed by a lamia, hopefully soon back with us.
Artkel Certor	Ed	Human	Fighter 9	Shoanti, Spider clan.
Maru Maru	Patrick	Human	Monk 6, Tattooed Monk 5	Shoanti, Sun clan
Valgrim Battlehorn	Ernest	Dwarf	Conjurer 3; Master Specialist 2; Paragnostical Apostle 1; Malconvoker 5	Fascinated by all manner of unusual creatures.
Vaelyn	Matt	Human	Gold Dragon Shaman 11	Shoanti, Sun clan

### *The Cards Speak to Us*

The characters are wakened in the morning by a young lad who informs them that *Madame Mvashti* wishes to see them out in her decrepit manor house outside the town. They arrive to find that she has her Harrow cards out and ready for them. She tells them, “I see that you have a difficult path ahead of you. I shall read the cards for you, that my insight may ease your way. Knowledge is power!” First, there is a choosing

- *Yenneck Grumman* draws the Unicorn. He will meet a miserly evil man, and will be instrumental in fighting him.
- *Phiravno* draws the Betrayal. In his travel he will find one who cuts people apart for their own amusement. Beware!
- *Maru Maru* draws the Liar. Quite an appropriate card for a monk, who has dedicated his life to a falsehood. It represents betrayal by a lover; he will be tempted, but must not give in. The one who tempts him will betray him.
- *Vaelyn* draws the Knight. Just as the knight fights a dragon, so he will have to. But the knight is merely the toy of the puppeteer.
- *Roscoe Dillon* draws the Empty Throne. This card has already come to pass: he has already met one who mourns for the glory of a throne long gone.
- *Valgrim Battlehorn* draws the Courtesan. She represents courtly intrigue, in this case the minion of one whom the characters will face.

The cards are:

<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
The Uprising	The Owl	The Dance
The Wanderer	The Mountain Man	The Carnival (T)
The Paladin (R)	The Rabbit Prince	The Waxworks (T)

The Paladin does not back down under any circumstance. Reversed, the characters’ inability to withdraw may lead to disaster. The Uprising represents conflict with a past Tyrant, while the Wanderer shows the items the characters have

The Owl represents the characters’ wisdom. The Mountain Man is a challenge, perhaps the giants that the characters must fight. The Rabbit Prince represents the risk of loss in battle.

The Waxworks is in true alignment, and represents the foes that await the characters. It also shows that the characters will meet creatures that are not real, simulacrums. They will be a difficult challenge. The Carnival is also in true alignment: the characters will come to a place like a maze of mirrors and have to overcome reflections of themselves. But if the characters come through these challenges unharmed, the Dance shows that they will gain resources to overcome further obstacles.

### *The Goblin Merchant*

The characters leave Madam Mvashti's and swiftly encounter some travelers who complain about a goblin on the road trying to sell them things. Immediately after that they encounter a goblin with a cart wearing oversized human merchant's clothing. This is the same goblin the characters previously encountered, and bought goods from. He offers, "Guaranteed goblin artwork! Guaranteed!"

He offers artwork for 12 gold. Valgrim Battlehorn notices that though the drawing is crude, there is a magical scroll on the back: a clerical scroll of *Cure Disease*. Roscoe Dillon forks over 12 gold. A quick search finds another scroll in his stock, this one of *Detect Undead* and *Protection from Animals* for only 10 gold. And then Vaelyn (who wants to make something of a project of this particular goblin) buys out the rest of his stock for 50 gold. Sadly, the rest of his stock looks very much like trash salvaged from the garbage dump on the north end of town.

### *The Journey to Rimeskull*

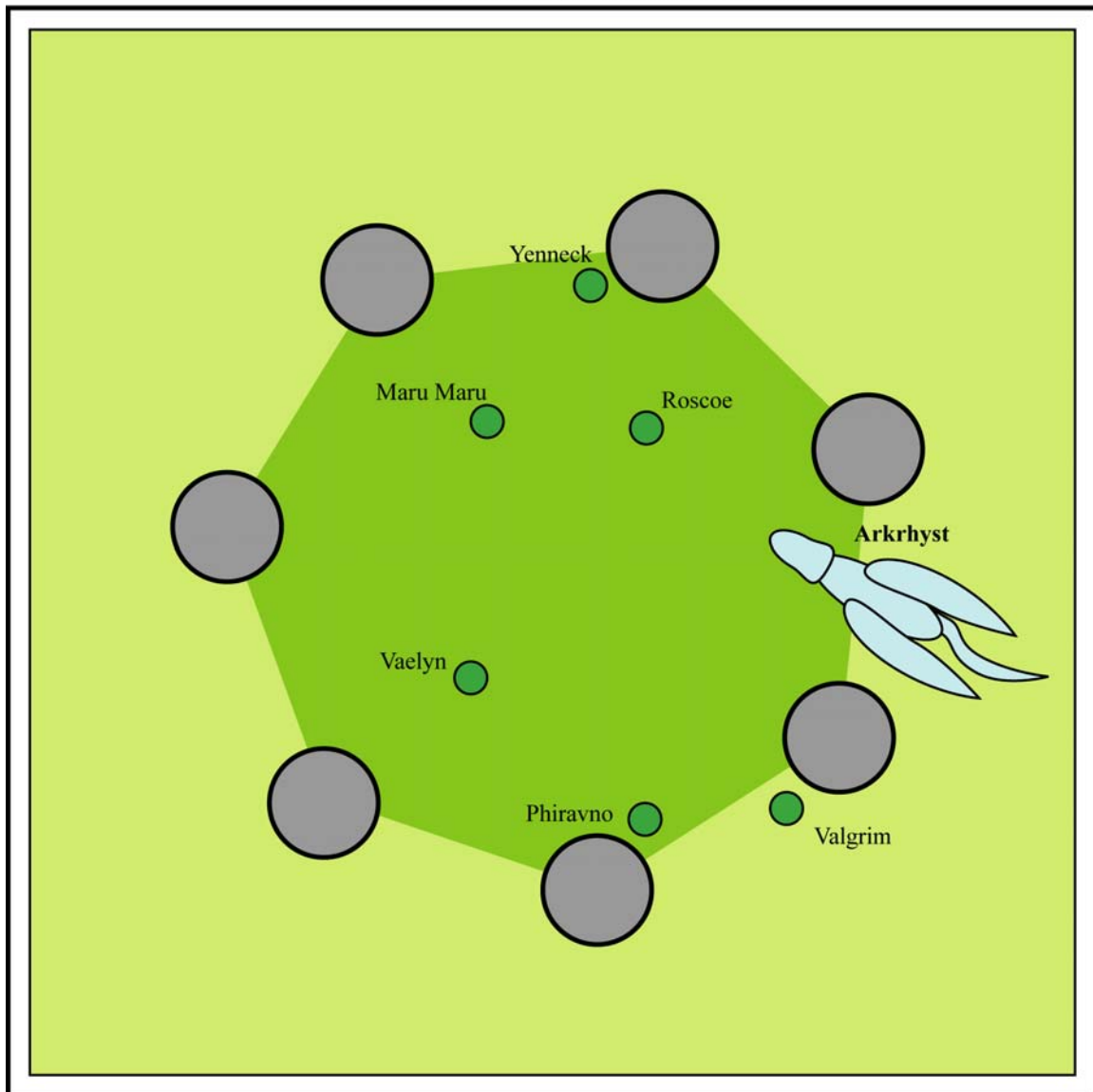
The characters *Teleport* to Magnimar where they purchase a *Field Provisions Box* in common and hire passage up to Riddleport. Several characters also acquire some *Everlasting Rations* just to be sure. From Riddleport, they arrange a charter vessel to take them past the abandoned ruins of Brinewall to Lake Stormunder and the grim wall of Rimeskull.

### *The Circle of Stone Heads*

Rimeskull includes a sihedron circle of seven stone heads, warded against the effects of passing time. A giant stone stairway (foot-and-a-half steps) nearby leads up the mountainside to a huge carven stone skull with a cave visible in its mouth. Nothing is

visible within the darkness of the cave. The characters deduce that the seven stone heads probably correspond to the seven Runelords, but they cannot tell which is which.

### The Circle of Runelord Stone Heads



Valgrim Battlehorn suggests that ancient Thassalonian lore relates one sin to each school of magic, and that some of the rhymes the characters learned from the *Scribbler* suggests that obtaining the keys from each spell may require casting a spell from the appropriate school upon each skull. The characters decide to camp for the night as Valgrim memorizes appropriate spells. He casts *Leomund's Secure Shelter* and the characters settle down for the night.

At dusk, the seven skulls emanate a strange aura. Valgrim decides to start out right then. He casts *Charm Person* at the Lust head. The head absorbs the power of the spell. There is an unearthly vibration and a gold key appears in the head's mouth. Valgrim decides that he's going to try casting *Grease* upon the Sloth head, but the characters can't figure out which head that is.

While the group discusses which head matches which sin, the nearby dragon has more than enough time to cast all of its buffs before it attacks. *Arkrhyst* is a white dragon who some of the characters remember raided the Shoanti tribes decades ago. They had thought it dead, but as always nobody ever saw the body.

Valgrim Battlehorn swiftly summons a pack of abishai and sends them at the creature. He is dismayed to see that *Arkrhyst's Protection From Good* prevents them from even approaching. *Arkrhyst* responds by engulfing half of the characters in frost. Roscoe in turn responds by using *Dispel Magic* to peel away several of *Arkrhyst's* magical defenses.

Valgrim observes that *Arkrhyst* is unimpressed by the efforts of his abishai to cast *Wrack* so he elects to buy some time by casting *Solid Fog* around all of them. He is quite dismayed to see that *Arkrhyst* has *Gust of Wind* and uses it to dissipate the fog in a single round. The abishai are driven into a frenzy of rage by this display, a frenzy so strong that they are able to shred their way through the *Protection From Good* effect to clatter harmlessly upon *Arkrhyst's* indestructible hide.

Roscoe decides that a much better plan is to send his friends into the dragon's maw with *Air Walk*. He casts one on Vaelyn, exhausting the *Staff of Heaven and Earth*. He tells the dragon shaman, "Make good use of that, because it's the last one!"

Vaelyn seems to not be paying attention to Roscoe: he's far too obsessed with clawing his way up into the air, towards *Arkrhyst*.

Valgrim decides that Roscoe has the right idea: he casts *Fly* upon Phiravno and persuades him to run off to certain death. It doesn't take much: Phiravno has a lot of deep-seated issues to deal with and is constantly searching for ways to end himself.

*Arkrhyst* chuckles, "Pathetic warm-bloods, always so eager to fling yourself at me. But of course I am quite ready to oblige you." He engulfs most of the group in his freezing breath.

Phiravno responds by dropping into *Assassin's Stance* and striking Arkrhyst with *Obscuring Shadow Veil Strike*. Phiravno's blade chews deep into the dragon's side. He screams, "I hunger for death!" Nobody in the group sees any reason to doubt him.

Arkrhyst tears into Phiravno with teeth, claws, wings and the kitchen sink. He tears Phiravno into bloody gibbets. The fragments fall upon one of the Runelord statues. The others gasp in horror, taking only slight consolation in the fact that Arkrhyst took some damage from the *Energy Shield Aura* Vaelyn projects as he slaughtered poor Phiravno.

Fortunately, Roscoe Dillon is ready with a *Revivify* spell. He runs over to the ruins of Phiravno's body and swiftly uses it. Phiravno returns to life, albeit still wounded to the very doorstep of death's winter cottage.

Valgrim Battlehorn flings another *Dispel Magic* at Arkrhyst and peels away a couple more defenses.

Vaelyn runs up underneath Arkrhyst and spits a gout of flame at him. Arkrhyst acknowledges the attack, but only out of a sense of politeness. Then he falls upon Vaelyn with inhuman savagery. The two abishai flutter in to cover the dragon shaman. Vaelyn evades like he means it, avoiding all but a wing and a tail, but is still horribly injured. His body flops as though he has several broken bones. He flutters away from Arkrhyst and heals himself.

Valgrim Battlehorn decides that it is time to call out the weird guns. He summons a zak-yel and orders it at the dragon, explaining to the others that the creature is a fire energon. The zak-yel manages to burn Arkrhyst several times.

The dragon howls, "Everything burns me! Miserable dirt-spawn!" It withdraws two hundred feet to the cave on the mountainside. Vaelyn runs after it onto the stone stairs. As he touches the stairs, two huge earth elementals rise up out of the earth.

Phiravno sits up to see the elementals. He points his *Wand of Magic Missiles* at one of them and shoots it. He calls out, "I'm helping!"

The others imagine that Phiravno must surely be delirious until they see that Arkrhyst has retreated far into the cavern. They conclude that the dragon must surely be terrified by *Magic Missiles*.

Vaelyn has no time to consider the behaviour of dragons: he is too busy being knocked back down the stairs by a huge earth elemental. He staggers to his feet and roasts the creature with his fiery breath. Valgrim decides to show him how it's done: he uses *Dismissal* to send one of the elementals back to whence it came.

Maru Maru moves in to engage the remaining elemental. The elemental smashes him twice, crushing him to the ground. Roscoe launches a quick *Close Wounds* to keep him alive. And Phiravno opens up with *Ray of Enfeeblement* spells to peel the elemental down to size.

Yenneck steps up to the elemental and starts chopping at it. The elemental isn't that impressed, but it does strike back. Yenneck spits out his new-found spare teeth and continues cutting, happy that he's serving as enough of a distraction to allow Valgrim's zak-yel to inflict some real damage. The elemental smashes into Yenneck, sending him down pending another *Close Wounds* from Roscoe. Yenneck withdraws from the fight.

Phiravno improves the situation a bit more by hitting the elemental with more *Rays of Enfeeblement*. Roscoe casts *Bless Weapon* upon Vaelyn's earthbreaker and sends him down into the caverns to chase down the dragon. Vaelyn makes it past the elemental, turns about to obliterate the elemental with a quick fire breath, and then heads deeper into the cavern after the dragon. Everyone else, keenly aware that their spells are expiring, moves after him.

### *The Rimeskull Caverns*

The characters jog down into the tunnels, stopping at two large sentinel statues. Each holds one hand upraised, as if to ward off intruders. Valgrim sends his summoned creatures past to no ill effect. The characters continue past them and down an icy slope. A fog-covered icy slope. The more agile characters move forward on their own, the flying characters simply evade the ice, and the remainder are carried along by abishai. They all note that the slope ends at a gaping chasm of darkness.

The characters lower themselves down into the cavern below, admiring an array of seven ice pillars carved with ancient runes surrounding an eighth pillar with a needle-sharp point. The floor of the cavern is clearly Arkrhyst's lair, in that a pile of various coins is visible, along with an array of empty potion vials.

## Arkrhyst Redux

Yenneck examines the dragon tracks and points out, “The dragon went down that way!” The characters pick their way down the corridor, ending up in a large chamber and Arkrhyst.

Yenneck recognizes that there’s nothing to do for it beyond running to the attack, so he does so. Sadly, his blade snicks off the dragon’s hide with no actual effect. Valgrim summons up a pair of vor-yugoloths and orders them forward. They obey with the depressingly characteristic slavish obedience of summoned monsters. One of them manages to get past Arkrhyst’s *Protection from Good*, but it is no more accurate than Yenneck. Vaelyn and Maru Maru thunder in, but their attacks are for naught as well.

Arkrhyst responds to the crush of characters by engulfing them in cold. Roscoe answers him by casting *Dispel Magic* and obliterating half of Arkrhyst’s magical protections.

Phiravno moves in and executes a *Shadow Jaunt* to place himself squarely behind Arkrhyst. Then Vaelyn, Phiravno, Maru Maru and Yenneck start unloading attacks upon the beast. Arkrhyst responds by flying over all of them and snapping at Valgrim. The dwarf flings himself to the ground and evades certain death, then uses *Benign Transposition* to swap places with one of his abishai. The abishai, beyond everyone’s expectation, actually manages to hit the dragon in the snout. And then Phiravno manages to slay the creature.

Valgrim orders his vor-yugoloths, “Dance the dance of evil victory!” The yugoloths dance in a manner that causes the characters to look away. They console themselves by searching the dragon and retrieving his horde.

- 39,500 copper pieces
- 9418 silver pieces
- 3500 gold pieces
- 250 platinum pieces
- Tapestries, furniture, and various other items worth 16,000 gold
- A quiver with 14 masterwork arrows and 2 *Greater Dragonslaying* arrows
- *A Belt of Giant Strength +4*
- A teak box containing six *Thunderstones*



- An ivory set of *Lesser Bracers of Archery*
- A *Darkwood Buckler*
- A *Chime of Opening* (5 charges)
- A *Cloak of Resistance* +3
- A *Flametongue*
- A masterwork suit of full plate decorated with onyx ravens on the shoulders
- A suit of *Half Plate* +3 with a wolf motif
- Six vials of *Frozen Holy Water*
- A *Pearl of Power* (1<sup>st</sup> level)
- Thirteen *Potions of Cure Light Wounds*
- Two *Potions of Resist Energy* (20, cold)
- Two *Mithril Chain Shirts* +1
- A scroll of *Globe of Invulnerability*
- A scroll of *Heal*
- A scroll of *Remove Blindness/Deafness*
- A wand of *Bear's Endurance* (38 charges)
- A wand of *Cure Light Wounds* (46 charges)
- An *Adamantine Warhammer* +1
- A pile of empty healing potion bottles

Roscoe takes the *Pearl of Power*, the *Wand of Bear's Endurance*, the *Wand of Cure Light Wounds* and the *Cloak of Resistance* +3. Yenneck Grumman takes the *Flametongue* and the *Lesser Bracers of Archery*. Phiravno takes a *Mithril Chain Shirt* +1. Valgrim takes the *Adamantine Warhammer* +1 and the *Chime of Opening*.

On the way out, Roscoe casts *Mass Snow Shoes* on the party to ensure that there aren't any untimely chasm-related deaths.

### *Gathering the Keys*

The characters spend some time deducing which head corresponds to which Sin and casting spells (or, alternately, summoning creatures to cast appropriate spells) to produce the various keys. Then it's back in to the eight ice pillars. The characters find that each of the seven surrounding pillars has a keyhole on the inner side, four feet from

the ground. Each character (and a summoned nera) places a key in a keyhole and turns it twice. A vortex appears, seven feet across. The characters enter, and find themselves in Runeforge. Specifically they find themselves in a twenty-foot-wide corridor.

Soon enough, an image appears and starts explaining the secrets of Runeforge. It tells the characters that Runeforge is carved into the center of a cubic mile of stone in its own demiplane. The only way to enter is through *Plane Shifting* in with the correct keys. There are seven wings of Runeforge, but the image fades before it can explain any more.

The characters continue forward into a grand domed seven-sided hall. A massive statue of each Runelord decorates the center of each wall. Seven corridors lead away from the hall. And a prismatic pool upon a raised dais occupies the center of the hall.

Maru Maru looks into the prismatic pool, ignoring Valgrim's order, "Nobody touch nothing!" He feels alternating heat and cold from the pool. Then he prods it with a stick. Then he touches it. Instantly, his mind is assaulted by a tangled collage of images from past, present and future. Fortunately, the effect is not so strong as to completely erase more than half his identity: the entity that was once known as Maru Maru is able to draw its hand back as it reflects upon what it really means to be "human" from a completely new perspective.

### *The Vault of Conjuration*

The characters move down the Vault of Conjuration. Yenneck finds that he is trapped in an endless hallway, at least for a while. Then he makes his way through the effect and joins the rest of the group.

The other characters enter into an area of natural caverns with pools. Divans and soft beds are arrayed around the pools to allow relaxation while studying. Unfortunately the pools have become wretched cesspools of filth and scum and the area itself is toxic, a combination of *Cloudkill* and *Acid Fog*. They all take damage. Maru Maru complains, "This place sucks. Why did we come here?" They leave, bringing Yenneck along with them.

### *The Vault of Greed*

Only Roscoe and Valgrim manage to make it down the corridor into the Vault of Greed. They find a door studded with gemstones and a keyhole. By the time Valgrim

gets out the Key of Greed, the others have made it through the corridor. Valgrim places the Key of Greed against the door, which promptly attempts to crush him. The others pull Valgrim to safety. He gasps out, “Help... me...”

The others see that the so-called “door” is actually nothing more than a giant iron plate on a piston. Phiravno searches for a secret door and (unsurprisingly) locates one at the end of the corridor.

Beyond the secret door is a beautifully but tastelessly decorated corridor that vanishes into mist. Valgrim puts on his *Fog-Cutting Goggles* and looks beyond the mist. He sees a chamber set in silver and ivory with a fountain in the shape of a silver whale with water coming from its blow-hole. He sends a conjured spider down the corridor and is appalled to see that the spider is first transformed into a goldfish, and then teleported away.

Roscoe casts *Wind Wall* to get the fog out of the way. The others run through. They examine the fountain and find six water mephits playing in the pool. They chirp out something to the effect of, “Goody! More fleshies for us to murder!” Valgrim answers by offering them an orgy with a summoned mephit instead. The mephits are all over that offer. The characters walk past as seven water mephits splash and play. In passing, Valgrim asks about other locals. One mephit pauses from playing to mention that the “mean silver man” sometimes comes by and casts mean spells. The mephits hide in the Elemental Plane of Water when he’s around.

The characters take the north corridor out. They find a very colorful fountain depicting a human wizard with a staff in one hand and one raised hand from which the water pours. Several goldfish swim in the pool. Valgrim tells them, “Anyone who retains their native intelligence, swim over here.” One of them does, so Valgrim casts *Dispel Magic* upon it. He learns that his powers are not strong enough to break the effect.

### **Ordikan the Mithril Mage**

Yenneck examines the floors and concludes that in the last several thousand years there has only been one person wandering through the hall. He is able to find bare human footprints, but heavy-seeming as if the maker was wearing armor, or made from metal.

He leads the others down the hall and into another square room with another stone wizard statue. From there, the characters open a door and find a laboratory with a man inside. He looks like his skin is made from mithril. There are several caged laboratory animals among the books and papers.

Valgrim attempts to make conversation. He learns that he's talking to *Ordikan*, who is none too convinced by the basic worth of the lesser flesh races. Valgrim and Phiravno manage to get him talking. He explains that he is trying to relearn the secrets of transmuting flesh into metal, as he had been transformed. Unfortunately, it looks like he's been in Runeforge long enough that his memories are getting pretty patchy. The characters have a rather profitless conversation with him then walk on past.

The characters find another wizard fountain with goldfish. Two of them prove to respond to Valgrim's query. He determines that he's going to need quite a few *Break Enchantment* spells. The characters move on. The various doors along the corridors from goldfish room to goldfish room all seem to lead to storerooms. The only place left that the characters haven't looked is behind the one door that the mithril man claims leads to his quarters.

When the characters talk to the mithril man the second time, he has no recollection of the last time he talked to them. They persuade him that they're here to clean his rooms, which gets them right in.

### **The Mithril Man's Private Rooms**

The room beyond the door is gorgeously decorated. Ten golden statues of men and women in various stages of combat readiness stand in the room. Closer examination reveals expressions of surprise, anger and fear on their faces. The characters make the obvious conclusion that they're all people who got transformed into gold.

The characters figure that there's nothing to be done for the unfortunate gold people so they continue on into another chamber decorated with the same kind of remarkable opulence. A massive pool of blue-glowing liquid stands in the center of the chamber. Strange shapes move in the depths of the pool.

Valgrim concludes that the pool is suffused with raw magical energy, and that it might be able to recharge magical items. He tries dipping a *Wand of Bear's Endurance*

into the pool. It begins to glow, but Valgrim determines that it hasn't gained any charges. He tries again with the *Wand of Enervation*. The pool drains the wand to nothing and throws Valgrim across the room. Wham!

For some reason, these outcomes don't dissuade the characters. Vaelyn manages to fully recharge a *Wand of Scorching Ray*. As a side effect, the wand also ends up glowing as brightly as a torch. Valgrim manages the same trick with the *Chime of Opening*. Then Phiravno manages to completely blow up a *Wand of Vampiric Touch*. He evades all damage with a remarkable backflip, but the entire room is scorched. He breathlessly tells the others, "Best... room... ever!"

Roscoe puts a bit of the water into an empty vial, being very careful to avoid touching it in the process. He ends up with a vial full of clear water that radiates transmutation magic.

## **Back to Ordikan**

The characters decide that the information they need is probably stuck in Ordikan's books. They try several stratagems to get him to let them look at them, none of which work. Then they convince him that those nasty mephits are acting up, which is enough to get him out of the lab long enough to grab up a selection of books and take them into one of the storerooms for inspection.

Valgrim determines that the books are detailed notes upon various transmutation magics. They provide a +5 bonus to Knowledge (arcana) rolls on subjects related to transmutation magic. They also summarize the plan to suspend the Runelord Karzoug in a massive runewell in Xin-Shalast, midway between Golarion and the hostile plane of Leng. Unfortunately the books do not detail the steps needed to actually restore the Runelord Karzoug, and (obviously) at this time the transmuters of Runeforge are all dead.

The books also include Ordikan's spellbooks. Most of the spells are standard (if rather wordily described). He also knows the spell *Blood Money*, which allows a wizard to create material foci for spells by shedding blood (and taking STR damage). Valgrim copies this spell into his own spellbooks and then persuades the others that they need to return the books to Ordikan.

Once Ordikan's books have been replaced, the characters arrange to put the four "intelligent" goldfish into empty potion bottles for later restoration. Valgrim does try some *Break Enchantment* and *Dispel Magic* effects on one goldfish before the characters leave, to no avail.

### *The End of the Session*

Each character gains 5729 experience points. Roscoe, Valgrim, Vaelyn and Maru all move to 12<sup>th</sup> level.