

Rise of the Runelords Session Summary 08/03/2008

Attendance

Chris (Roscoe Dillon) offers, “We’re going to get barbecue! I read a review of a new place that sounds pretty good!” *Paul* answers, “I’m good with that, so long as it’s traditional Kentucky-style barbecue!” *Bruce* (Yenneck Grumman) shudders. *Chuck* (Phiravno) cuffs him and remonstrates, “Pansy! You Yankee people do things at least as gruesome, except that your habits all revolve around fish. And things that look like fish, but walk like men.” *Ernest* muses, “The great thing about New England is that lobster is common enough there that they just treat it as an ingredient... but then they use it in recipes designed by Yankees...” He looks pale of a sudden. *Peco* decides that now would be a good time to observe a measured silence.

After lunch, *Matt* (Vaelyn) looks at the others and asks, “Did anything interesting happen this morning? You say you went to lunch, but you still seem hungry.” *Patrick* (Maru Maru) adds, “Yes, still hungry. And more savage...”

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Class & Level</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Yenneck Grumman	Bruce	Human	Ranger 9, Warblade 4	Another Chelaxian, a Black Arrow
Roscoe Dillon	Chris	Human	Cleric 12, Warblade 1	Shoanti, Skull tribe. Cleric of Gorum
Phiravno	Chuck	Human	Swordsage 5; Swashbuckler 4; Rogue 4	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 8, Tattooed Monk 5	Shoanti, Sun clan
Valgrim Battlehorn	Ernest	Dwarf	Conjurer 3; Master Specialist 2; Paragnost 1; Apostle 1; Malconvoker 7	Fascinated by all manner of unusual creatures.
Vaelyn	Matt	Human	Gold Dragon Shaman 13	Shoanti, Sun clan

The Search for Xin-Shalast

While most of the group spends their money on shiny magic items, *Valgrim Battlehorn* sends his dwarf allies out to retrieve books from every abandoned library the

characters have visited. Then he studies diligently, looking for any leads to discern the location of fabled Xin-Shalast. He eventually finds a handwritten note from a long-forgotten author indicating that the dwarven *Vekker* brothers from Janderhoff were instrumental in organizing a failed expedition to find Xin-Shalast out in the Lower Kodar mountains. They left a variety of bankrupted investors behind them, and their names are still held in disdain in their home city.

The characters *Teleport* to Janderhoff to ask after the brothers. Initially they are only able to find a lot of people who agree that the brothers absconded into the mountains with a large sum of money. Most think that the brothers used the story of Xin-Shalast as a way to cheat gullible fools out of their fortunes. Phiravno quickly decides that the group has hit a dead end, so he simply gets himself drunk for three days.

Valgrim refuses to give up, however. He draws upon appalling scrying magic and additional sources until he is able to find a story indicating that Xin-Shalast stands at the headwaters of the *River Alf*, which he suspects might be the modern-day *Kazaron River*. He is also able to determine that in its greatness the Realm of Shalast was the second wealthiest of the Thassalonian realms, known for the massive production of its gold, silver and mithril mines. However, for all that its streets were rumored to be paved with gold all of that wealth was mostly poured into *Runelord Karzoug's* alchemical furnaces. He also learns that there were two castes in the ancient Thassalonian empire, the Warriors and the Providers. The survivors of the Warrior caste are the present-day Shoanti tribes, while the Providers evolved into the decadent Varisians. He also learns the three most popular theories on the End of Thassalon:

- *The Aboleths' Revenge* – the aboleths destroyed Thassalon in revenge for the Thassalonians' theft of glyph and life-creation magics.
- *The Decadent Fall* - Corruption, cronyism, and the summoning of a variety of aberrations from the outer planes, including the *Silver Walkers*, the *Inverted Giants* and the terrible *Oliphaunt of Jandalay*, were responsible for corrupting and destroying Thassalon. Dismissing the Oliphaunt, in particular, destroyed one-quarter of the Peacock Legion.
- *The Revolt of the Giants* – the Rune-giants that served the Runelords turned upon their masters and destroyed them and all vestiges of their rule.

The characters get themselves a modern map of the area in Janderhoff, and copy an ancient map out of the Library of Thassalon underneath the Monastery of the Peacock. As *Roscoe Dillon* so eloquently puts it, “Ancient ruins or not, we don’t want to accidentally walk into an area that everyone’s known for years is inhabited by a tribe of Sphincter-Breaking Ogres.” The others shudder and agree.

The Lands of the Sun Clan

The characters make plans to travel to the Cinderlands to visit with the Sun Clan. Half of the group is Sun Clan Shoanti anyway, so this amounts to something of a homecoming for them. The others spend a lot of time figuring out who will provide the *Endure Elements* spells to protect themselves from the bitter cold and unforgiving heat of the Cinderlands.

Yenneck Grumman asks, “What’s the climate like right now? What time of year is it?”

Vaelyn is a bit uncertain, “I think it’s late summer, so it’ll be hot. Or cold.” *Maru Maru* remains silent.

Yenneck starts to wonder about the much-vaunted survival skills of the Shoanti.

The characters *Teleport* into a Shoanti encampment to speak to relatives, then head out over the Cinderlands with *Wind Walk* and *Long-Distance Flight*. From time to time they look down upon the sights of the Cinderlands, including massive ankheg nests rising up over the plains, shattered city ruins stretching on for miles, and the rumbling hillocks that represent bulette lairs. At night, *Valgrim* provides shelter in the form of a *Leomund’s Secure Shelter*.

Exploring the Kodar Mountains

The characters swiftly conclude that the Kodar Mountains are really quite inhospitable to life, though those residents they observe are often incredibly powerful monsters. The characters are exploring near a particularly craggy canyon when a boulder sails right through *Vaelyn’s* gaseous shape. *Valgrim* peers down and sees a trio of giants six meters tall. He tells the others, “Cloud giants. Very dangerous.”

Roscoe Dillon asks, “I thought cloud giants normally lived upon cloud-shrouded mountain peaks. What are these doing in a canyon?”

Valgrim shoots back, “I don’t know! What do I look like, the Roger Tory Peterson of giant-dom? Maybe they’re gathering pretty rocks to throw at us.” As he talks, more huge boulders come sailing through various insubstantial characters.

The Vekker Mining Company

Days later, the characters find a cabin perched at the edge of a sixty-foot cliff. A spiral stair and a pulley-and-rope arrangement lead up the cliff. The place is built to dwarf scale, and is covered in lichen and moss. It looks like it has not been occupied for years.

Roscoe Dillon opines, “This looks like the dwarf explorers’ base camp. If they’re not home, it’d make a really good advance base for us.” The characters agree and solidify up to investigate.

Valgrim checks out the split-log benches on the porch and notes, “This is very rustic dwarf design. Check out the bear-skull trophies!” He reads a sign claiming that this is the *Vekker Mining Company*.

Roscoe, Phiravno and Yenneck all get the creepy feeling that they’re being watched. They see a wild-eyed dwarf male stagger from the snow, bloody wounds visible on his exposed flesh. Yenneck challenges him, asking if he is one of the Vekker brothers. Roscoe moves closer to cast a heal spell, but as he approaches he feels a sense of dread emanating from the dwarf. He casts the spell and sees another wound open upon the dwarf’s body. Roscoe concludes that all is not well.

Phiravno doesn’t waste time: he launches a *Shadow Jaunt* and moves behind the dwarf. The dwarf responds by howling, “Run! Run for your life! They’re going to eat you!” He runs for it. Yenneck is overcome with the conviction that the other characters are cannibals and are trying to eat him. He drops his blades and runs into the snow. Fortunately, he doesn’t race straight off the cliff.

Roscoe Dillon casts *Remove Fear* on the fleeing ranger. Yenneck sees a momentary vision of Gorum, Lord of Battle.

The deity orders Yenneck, “Man up, soldier!”

Yenneck stammers back, “Yes sir! But it’s too late for my pants, sir!”

Gorum responds, “It’s never too late for your pants, boy!”

Yenneck makes his way back to the cabin and the others. He arrives in time to hear Valgrim say, “I think this place is just haunted. Should be a good place to rest up.” Valgrim casts *Protection from Evil* on himself, just to be sure.

Valgrim tests the door and finds that it is stuck. He gestures to Vaelyn, who slams himself into it until it comes unstuck. Inside, the place is in tatters. A painting of two dour-looking dwarves standing in front of an enormous elk stands askew over the fireplace. Valgrim, ever the cleanliness freak, moves to straighten the painting.

It is when the characters move to the kitchen that several of them start to feel unusually hungry. They are still looking around when *everyone* starts to feel ravenous, unnatural hunger, matched with a conviction that only the flesh and blood of their companions will sate this hunger. The characters decide to retreat outside. The hunger pangs subside.

Continued investigation with Vaelyn’s wand of *Clairvoyance* shows that the hut at the base of the cliff contains a wide variety of mining tools. The larder in the cabin contains a huge stack of dwarf bones. Roscoe Dillon points out that the Vekker brothers’ business plan was to strip Xin-Shalast of gold and sell it in civilization. He concludes that they found something that drove them crazy.

Vaelyn suggests trying to remove specific items from the cabin to see if the characters can interrupt the haunting effect. Valgrim summons up a small earth elemental to open up the doors and bring out three items: the cooking pot from the kitchen, the leather chest from the bedroom and the metal coal-chest from the common room. The leather chest turns out to contain relatively mundane personal possessions. The coal-chest contains coal.

The Cursed, Cursed Tree

The characters clamber down to the base of the cliff and search around. Yenneck finds a mound of mine tailings. He is investigating it when Valgrim calls down, “That’s debris from extracting gold ore! It’s full of arsenic that has leached into the surrounding ground and killed everything!” Yenneck wipes the sand off his hands and sees that Valgrim is correct: the only thing remaining around the pile is a gargantuan dead tree. Then the tree attacks him.

The tree's flailing branch knocks Yenneck flying. Then the virulent fungus on the branch gets into his bloodstream and inflicts three points of Dexterity damage. Yenneck howls as strange purplish tendrils spread underneath his skin.

Phiravno screams, "Not my Dexterity! Not my Dexterity!" He flings himself away from the tree, only barely avoiding the thing's counterstrike. He sends a *Returning Dagger* at the tree, but his throw is off-balance and the blade glances harmlessly off the tree's bark.

Roscoe looks at the tree and thinks, "It doesn't *look* undead, but at the same time it doesn't exactly look alive either." He decides that he may as well try to turn the thing. He reports to the others, "I think it really is undead, but it's too powerful for me to attack!"

Maru Maru simply starts beating upon the creature with his bare fists.

The tree attacks Yenneck again. The others are frankly surprised that Yenneck is still alive: they are able to see splashes of fungus-infected ranger blood spreading across the sand pile. Yenneck scrambles away from the thing.

Vaelyn yells out, "Burn, tree! Burn!" He spits flames across it and chuckles in satisfaction as it crackles and burns.

Valgrim summons an inferno spider, explaining that it is a large spider composed entirely of magma. The spider flings itself against the tree, leaving scorched lines across the creature's bark. It also entangles the tree in an aethereal web, an effect that confuses both the tree and the other characters.

The tree turns and tramples through both the inferno spider and Phiravno. Yenneck screams, "It can move? It can *move*? I thought I was safe!"

Phiravno screams something back, but nobody else can make it out because he's buried underneath a gigantic tree.

Valgrim decides that the situation is looking pretty bad. He casts an *Acid Storm* on the tree, incidentally catching Phiravno in the blast. Pieces of tree wither and fall away. Plumes of poisonous smoke billow into the air.

Phiravno slashes madly from deep within the tree's roots, delivering a substantial wound. It charges Yenneck, leaving an opening for Maru Maru to slay it.

Vaelyn uses his shamanic powers to heal the thirteen points of Dexterity that Yenneck lost to the fungus. Roscoe heals up the rest of the damage. And Maru Maru investigates the arsenic sands around its roots to find no real treasure. Surprise, surprise.

The Healthful Benefits of Gold

With the horror tree dead, the characters decide to investigate the lower building to see if the curse has passed. Phiravno reports that the lock still works, and is surprisingly good (DC 32). Maru Maru and Vaelyn pass inside and search the place. They find a cot for a single dwarf (complete with a pair of muddy boots and a long-lost hidden punch dagger), plus the heavily arsenic-tainted signs of ore processing.

Then they see a dwarf squatting near the sluice, panning for gold dust. Then he turns and reveals that he has no eyes. Gold dust is scattered in his beard. He tells them, “You have to try this! It is *so* delicious!” He stuffs a handful of gold dust into his mouth. “Oh, oh, delicious gold!” As he consumes gold, his features become more and more emaciated.

Maru Maru attempts to grapple him. As he touches the dwarf, the creature explodes into bloody gibbets and vanishes. As does all the gold dust.

Maru Maru and Vaelyn continue until they find the stairway shaft up to the top of the cliff. Meanwhile, Valgrim examines the punch dagger and finds that it is valuable:

- *Punch Dagger +1*

Following the Trail

Yenneck picks out the old mine trail leading to the Vekker brothers’ final mine. They come upon a ridge some twenty miles away from the main cabin. The mine is dug into the flank of the ridge. Roscoe is impressed, “Those dwarves really did range pretty far from their main camp to work. Heigh-ho, heigh-ho.”

The characters camp for the night. All through the night, Phiravno experiences vivid nightmares of starvation and cannibalism, waking fatigued. He tells the others that he had a really good dream about a hot chick who would do everything he said. The others examine his haggard-eyed expression and call upon the dragon shaman to correct the problem.

Early in the morning, the characters approach the mine. The entrance stands under the lip of a hundred foot cliff. Valgrim looks up and spots something that looks like a gravestone. He flies up to find that the whole place is engulfed in fog. His *Fog-cutter Goggles* are enough to cut through the fog. He sees several dwarven gravestones, including one labeled Silas Vekker. A frozen dwarf body, mangled as if from a fall from a great height, lies near a long-dead firepit. The body wears armor. Its legs are burned away.

Roscoe casts *Wind Walk* and brings everyone up to the graveyard. Valgrim searches the body. The moment he touches the corpse, a horrible ghost flies out and uses his frightful moan. Vaelyn succumbs and is panicked. He flings himself off the edge of the cliff, grabbing hold of the edge just in time to avoid plummeting to a grisly death.

Yenneck steps up to the ghost and swings, but his blade slices harmlessly through the creature. The ghost attempts to fling him and Valgrim off the cliff, but the characters manage to stand their ground. Valgrim responds by summoning a guardinal equinal that shoots the creature full of *Magic Missiles*.

Yenneck strikes a second time, hacking great chunks of ectoplasm away from the ghost. The creature looks deeply injured. Roscoe moves in and launches a *Bolt of Glory* with his *Gauntlets of Ghost Fighting*, completely obliterating the creature. He tells the others, "I shot it full of the blinding glory of Gorum!" Then he casts *Remove Fear* on Vaelyn.

Before the guardinal evaporates, Valgrim has it create a permanent *Wall of Stone* safety barrier three feet high along the cliff edge.

Deducing that the ghost was the ghost of the dead dwarf, the characters dig a grave for the body. The characters then examine the gravestones. They discover that there are no bodies underneath the stones, and that the stones look like they were carved by someone who was not particularly sane. Also, *Karivek Vekker's* name is not on any of the stones, suggesting that he is the fallen body. He is wearing a surprisingly well-preserved suit of armor:

- *Cold Resistant Improved Padded Armor +4*

The characters take the body and then check out the mine. The mine turns out to be of very little interest: it might be productive, but it hasn't seen any activity for years. It

certainly isn't obviously the road to Xin-Shalast. Before the characters *Teleport* back to the cabin, Valgrim changes the label to "Valgrim Mining Company".

The Weather Turns Grim

Almost as soon as the characters arrive back at the base of the mesa a blizzard descends. Valgrim creates a *Leomund's Secure Shelter* and the characters wait out the night. The next morning, the blizzard is deeper than before. Yenneck reports that in this part of the world blizzards can last for weeks, long enough to prompt a group of dwarves to resort to cannibalism.

To pass the time, Valgrim decides to get some bones from the larder so he has something to use *Speak With Dead* on. He summons up a clockwork mender and orders it to fetch him some. He uses an *Arcane Eye* to follow the creature's progress. The clockwork flits outside and is promptly destroyed by something horrible. He recognizes the creature responsible as a wendigo. Valgrim wets himself.

After he emerges from his scrying trance, Valgrim explains the situation to the other characters. He then seats himself at the writing desk so conveniently included in the standard *Leomund's Secure Shelter* design and composes a semi-coherent rant appropriate to someone who was killed by a wendigo.

Once the characters are finished panicking, they design a clever plan: the group will try to move across to the dwarf cabin. Everyone will be tied together, with Maru Maru and Yenneck serving as the anchors at either end. Valgrim will cast *Enlarge Person* on the two of them. Then they will run to the cabin.

The wendigo gets one shot at the characters and it uses it to howl. Yenneck, Vaelyn and Maru Maru all panic. The wendigo flies in at Valgrim, causing him to panic as well. The creature is tall, white and emaciated (a Yankee!) with a head topped by massive elk horns and legs that end in blackened stumps.

Valgrim decides that there's nothing that summoned monsters can't fix. He summons two amnizu demons. Roscoe uses a *Mass Resurgence* to break Maru Maru out of his panic, while Yenneck calls upon an *Iron Heart Surge* to calm himself. The two of them simply drag the panicked dragon shaman along.

The Wendigo Strikes!

Soon after the characters reach the cabin, more things start to happen. They can hear knocking from the outside, as if a lost traveler is looking for shelter. It lasts for four rounds, following by a loud crack from above, as if something were pushing the cabin off the cliff edge far above. The whole cabin shudders, and most of the characters fall. The images of starving dwarves appear around the edges of the room. Then voices, first wordless cries of pain and then phrases like, “Eating us... don’t let him... so hungry...”

Then with a sudden lurch, it all stops. A spirit, a balding dwarf with a dark brown beard and no eyes, speaks. “You are alive, you do not hunger. I sense that you seek the city of greed. Do not seek it or you will end up like me, cold and dead. I can show you the way. Bring my brother’s bones so I may reconcile with him.”

The characters hand him the bag of bones.

A strange sense of calm fills the structure as the spirit takes the bones. The cannibal ghost manifests and the bones crumble, then reform in his shape. The two ghosts engage in a brief contest of wills.

The wendigo decides that it will not stand for all this reconciliation. It drops out of its snow shape and attacks. Valgrim’s two amnizu demons snap-shot *Fireballs* at the creature only to see them evaporate against the creature’s spell resistance. They try a second volley to the same result, then move in to make a series of additional attacks with interestingly demonic names.

Phiravno moves out into the storm to attack. He wounds it with fire and it responds by savaging him with cold.

Roscoe moves in with his trusty *Bolt of Glory*, but the creature’s spell resistance blunts the strike.

Phiravno launches a *Obscuring Shadow Veil* strike out of his assassin’s stance, but the wendigo shifts to the side and his strike goes wide. The wendigo moves forward underneath Phiravno’s guard and tears him apart with claw and teeth. The clean snow is splashed dirty with blood.

Valgrim recites forbidden syllables, reaching out into the ghastly depths with his powers. Two chain devils respond and lash into the wendigo with their chains. They pierce deep and hold fast, but the wendigo’s unnatural vitality protects it. Furious,

Valgrim launches an *Orb of Acid* at the creature, burning away the flesh upon its face and torso. Valgrim invokes his *Belt of Battle* and launches a *Disintegrate* as a follow-up, burning away more corroded flesh from the creature. A sickening fog surrounds the creature.

The wendigo staggers, then Yenneck launches into it with a whirlwind of fiery strikes. The shattered cinders of the creature's corpse fall to the ground. The characters avert their eyes as the chain demons tear it to shreds.

With the wendigo gone, the storm abates and the ghost of Karivek slowly fades. The ghost of Silas looks more peaceful, but still regretful. He tells the characters that his ledger will show them the way. Before he vanishes, five ledger pages appear and float to the ground. They sketch out the route to Xin-Shalast in five stages, starting from the headwaters of the Kazaron River.

Maru Maru examines the ledger pages and tells the others, "Hey, there's a recipe for dwarf in here!"

The characters go through the cabin with *Detect Magic* and *Detect Undead* active, making certain that it is secure. Valgrim uses *Prestidigitation* to clean the place up, then writes out the story of Silas and Karivek Vekker in detail. He hopes that their story will be a useful cautionary tale for young dwarves.

The Secret Room

The characters spend a few days searching through the cabin. After pulling out some floorboards and breaking through some walls, they find the hidden room. It contains:

- The brothers' ledger book, detailing all of their assay points and mining attempts. It includes maps of the region. Unfortunately, none of their mines have paid out. The last five pages of the book are missing, but the characters have those already.
- Five forty-pound burlap sacks of gold dust (each worth 1000 gold)
- Two forty-pound burlap sacks of gold nuggets (each worth 1500 gold)
- Fourteen uncut gems (each worth 50 gold, more if they are properly cut)

The characters have two weeks until the next full moon. They decide to rest at the cabin for a while, then allow Valgrim to summon and bind a glabrezu for the assault on Xin-Shalast.

Through the Headwaters of Alf

The characters climb thousands of feet from the headwaters of the Kazaron River, to a height of 1500 feet above sea level. This is high enough that the characters must make Fortitude saves or take ability damage. The cold is bitter and bone-chilling.

Valgrim assures the others, “The glabrezu has cold resistance 10, so it’s comfy.”

Roscoe points out, “I’m glad to see that you have your priorities set right.”

The characters climb to the headwaters to find an area of ice mists, a place where the chill is broken by geothermal heat. Frozen lichens drift atop treacherous pools of near-frozen water. Cold mists drift across the landscape.

At the headwaters, the characters see nothing. From the Vekker brothers’ instructions, they know that they must fast for four days at the full moon. They fast, but they are insensitive to the aura of the place. Most of them spend their time helping Valgrim write his highly sensationalized account of the Vekker brothers mining expedition. Yenneck, Phiravno and Roscoe don’t even notice the lack of food after four days. Only Maru Maru manages to put himself into an altered state of mine. Only Maru Maru sees that the headwaters of the Kazaron River continue on. He and Valgrim (who had been suffering the effects of hunger as well) walk on and vanish. None of the others are able to follow: they cannot see the hidden headwaters yet.

It takes twelve days before the whole group is able to transition through. The characters find a path through the Ice Fens and pick their way across. Yenneck is appointed guide because he is the only one with Survival skill. Because this is the first time he has ever managed to use Survival, he can’t stop himself from telling the others how wonderful it is to know Survival.

The Ice Maiden

Halfway through the Ice Fens the characters encounter a beautiful naked elf woman floating in mid-air. She seems to be covered in ice.

She asks the characters, “Do you like jokes? I have a great one!” Then she casts *Baleful Polymorph* at Valgrim.

He resists the spell, then responds, “I have a better one!” He flings a *Disintegrate* at her.

She responds with *Finger of Death*.

Valgrim resists the spell, though he does turn white from the side effects. He begs, "Peace! Peace! I'm grumpy because I haven't eaten in two weeks." Amazingly enough, he manages to talk her down.

She protests, "I didn't try to kill you, it was just a joke!"

Valgrim grumbles, "I don't like jokes."

"I came out to see you because my contacts told me that a group like you helped my cousin. Miriana was my cousin and I felt her death as a stab to my heart! I came to help you by warning you to stop traveling north! There is something not right up there."

Valgrim explains, "We have to travel there, because the Runelord Karzoug is trying to come back."

"Well, I cannot leave my Ice Fens unprotected, but if you should need a safe refuge as you destroy the city know that the Ice Fens is a refuge for you. Oh, and you should be careful about the giants, lamia and abominable snowmen that lurk all through Xin-Shalast." She also warns the characters that the whole region is near to some alien realm. There is also a magical field all around Xin-Shalast. She thinks it was created as a defense. The field renders the area impenetrable to magical scrying and magical transportation, creates intense vertigo, pushes outsiders away, and once per minute pulses to create intense pain.

On the plus side, the characters able to eat and rest in the Ice Fens without vanishing back to the real world.

After a bit of time resting, the characters resume their journey. Halfway through the trip, Maru Maru falls through a bit of thin ice and vanishes into a chill tarn. He takes some cold damage, but Vaelyn is able to pull him back out without too much trouble.

The Ancient Road

Beyond the Ice Fens the characters find an ancient road paved in flat stones with a gold sheen. The road is a hundred feet wide, clearly scaled to giant size. The whole place is covered in ice leading to a reasonable amount of slipping and sliding until Roscoe casts *Mass Snowshoes*.

After some miles of hiking the characters see a cave in a cliff sixty feet up above the road. Two huge giants are lurking inside. Valgrim looks up at them and tells the others, "Cloud giants. Very dangerous."

Yenneck answers, “On the plus side, I get +10 damage against these guys.”

The characters decide to try and parlay with them. Roscoe and Yenneck try to talk to them from a range of 300 feet, and are answered with a volley of stones. The characters run off to the attack, with Yenneck firing arrows as he runs.

Maru Maru closes with the giants first, pulling far ahead of the other characters. As he nears the cave, two more cloud giants show up. He dances around the rocks they fling at him, then activates his *Flying Boots* and leaps right up to the mouth of the cave.

Vaelyn and Roscoe, buoyed by a combination of *Haste* and *Fly*, launch themselves at the cave right after Maru Maru. Vaelyn spits a cone of flame into the cave, scorching the giants. One giant steps forward and slams Vaelyn with his gargantuan morningstar to retaliate.

Valgrim finally gets close enough to the cave to summon a pair of flying amnizu demons who immediately blanket the giants’ cave with *Fireballs*.

The giants lay about with their morningstars, managing to paste Vaelyn with a single strike. Valgrim responds by having his amnizus roast the area again, and then follows up with a *Glitterdust* spell that renders the giants not at all blinded but very attractive to look at.

Phiravno moves in on one badly scorched giant and unleashes his *Obscuring Shadow Veil*. The contents of the giant’s belly spill out through a long, ragged cut. The giant collapses to the cave floor.

Maru Maru tumbles up between the two surviving giants and attacks the most wounded of the two. The others snicker and make jokes about how Maru Maru likes being in a giant sandwich. Roscoe moves up to help out and slashes one giant with his greatsword. Vaelyn moves up to the second and cracks it in the kneecaps, staggering it.

With both giants near death, Valgrim orders his amnizus to launch one last *Fireball* volley, felling them both. The giants turn out to have some interesting loot:

- 1265 gold pieces in coins
- A chest of copper bars worth 500 gold pieces
- A fine cave bear cloak worth 2000 gold pieces

A First View of Xin-Shalast

As the characters come through the pass to see the city itself: a narrow mountain pass opens to a glacial valley filled with an ice-capped city of massive proportion. The way to the city is blocked by a tremendous fortress, leading to a great boulevard of gold. Nearly a quarter of the city has been overwhelmed by a glacial flow, covered over with a huge layer of ice. The great road itself continues on to the great peak of Mar Massif, leading straight up the slope, transforming into a great staircase. The buildings of the city continue up some distance along the mountain, but eventually give way. Right beneath the peak of the Mar Massif stands a massive palace with dozens of needle-sharp spires. The peak of Mar Massif itself has been shaped and carved into the likeness of a cruel, proud man – the Runelord Karzoug himself.

The End of the Session

Each character gains 7692 experience points, which is enough for most everyone to make it to 14th level. Valgrim remains the only character stuck at 13th level.