

Runesmith 211

Chapter 211: Troublesome armor.

“Tell the Acolytes to move the hosts to the ritual chamber, we will perform the dark baptism at midnight when the hour is nigh.”

“It shall be done.”

A large group of hooded people was standing in the middle of a village square that was seemingly deserted. The plants that had been here had long lost their shimmer, the roads were filled with weeds and the buildings were falling apart. It was clear that this place had long been deserted by its original inhabitants.

At this point in time, the majority of the hooded figures were gathered before a spire. This spire was in the shape of a double helix that continued upwards as if two pointy monster tongues were curling around each other.

Around it there were several of these acolytes, their words were incoherent for a regular person to understand but they were certainly chanting something. The thing in the middle of this unkempt village’s square continued to give out strange waves of energy along with bizarre symbols appearing on its surface.

They were all kneeling with their faces down, slamming their heads into the ground. Even if there were rocks they didn’t care for, they continued to chant and bow while their blood flowed into the soil. While they were wearing long robes the bony fingers beneath them told a tale.

The man shouting out orders had a slightly different robe along with a large ornate staff that looked like a deformed tree branch. On the focal point, there was an obsidian gem that shined with an eerie glow whenever he shouted out his orders. The people that were listening to him were quick to follow his orders as they turned around to go towards their new visitors.

A large group of merchants had made its way into their village. The wagons along with the people in it were being slowly pulled towards the inside of this town. Each and every person from the races seemed to be in some kind of dream state. They were all slumped over, the only indication of them being alive were their chests that were moving as they took in slow breaths.

The various animals that were pulling these wagons were awake, yet there was also something peculiar. Their eyes were pitch black and devoid of life. Even when these strange hooded individuals approached them they didn’t react. It was the reverse, they followed the instructions of the ones in this village as they pulled the heavy wagons towards the village square.

In the front was the one containing what seemed to be the main force of this convoy and their first target. After it was pulled towards the square the robed ones turned towards the entry point that was in the back. There they saw two people, one of them was a large brutish looking woman.

Classes:

T1 Dark Acolyte L16

T1 Scout L 25

The first thing that he noticed about this person was their low level. They didn't seem to be paying much attention as they continued to repeat some incoherent words while looking towards the middle of the village. There he saw a larger version of the spiral relic he had destroyed.

'That thing will be a lot harder to destroy, but this guy shouldn't be a problem.' Now came the big decision that he was afraid to make. The way before him looked to be relatively safe, the guards around him were weak and he would probably be able to take them out with ease. The big question was, what should he do after freeing himself? Should he help the others or flee while the cultists were unaware of his escape...

Chapter 212: Dark ritual.

A man recited something in an incomprehensible manner while looking towards a large double spiral tower. It was giving out a strange buzzing noise that was hard to make out and the glowing red runes pulsed whenever the noise was released. Perhaps if the person was paying more attention he would have noticed that someone was approaching from behind.

Soon within a fraction of a second two armored gauntlets appeared from behind him. One of them went for his mouth while the other started twisting. The robed figure's neck was being twisted causing his spine to be broken in quite the violent way.

But with the weapon in his hand, he could retaliate. Even though he couldn't turn around to see who was behind him, in a last-ditch effort he went for the stab. Yet instead of flesh being torn a scraping sound was heard instead. The dagger just slid off this armored assailant without being able to penetrate through the harder alloy.

'This seemed easier in movies...'

Roland's bad attempt at recreating a stealth kill from popular media went unnoticed thanks to his sound-canceling spell. Even though he was wearing heavy armor he had runic spells to shroud himself in the darkness. The man that he murdered continued to flail around even after he managed to snap his neck thanks to his enhanced strength.

'I got them both, but what now?'

After awakening from his slumber, he detected only two guards near his location. Everyone else was on the other side of this large monument. Even now it was releasing the illusory spell that kept everyone trapped and unable to fight back. There were a lot of questions on his mind as he was confused about what these cultists were doing.

First of all, some time had passed since the illusory trap had been activated. This time around it took him longer to get out of it than before. Time seemed to work differently in these illusory traps, perhaps due to the size of this relic, it was harder to awaken even when getting out through destroying the core rune.

His willpower stat that should aid him against attacks going for the mind didn't seem to work that well when this strange runic object was involved. It belonged to a cult of some kind of evil god, so he could only speculate that there was something besides regular magic involved here.

Due to him being out cold for so long the cultists had enough time to pull him out of the wagon along with all the other people. Yet when he was looking at the radar everyone seemed to be still alive.

'For some reason, they took everyone to that one location...'

While thinking Roland sneaked back towards the wagon he was stationed at. Strangely enough, his backpack was still there along with Griscalde's axe and his weapons. The way to the inside of the wagon was open but it didn't seem that these people were interested in their possessions.

'They didn't take anything?'

These cultists weren't acting like bandits, the people were alive and nothing seemed to have been moved. All the weapons the soldiers had were still there, it even seemed that these people purposely avoided moving anything. Which was very confusing to Roland as he didn't know what they were trying to achieve. Were they just going to come back later to take it all?

'What's going on here? These guys' aim doesn't seem to be to rob this caravan. Do they need living people for some kind of ritual?'

After his run-in with the Abyssal cult all those years ago he started doing research. There was not much that he could dig up as this cult was mostly shrouded in mystery. Besides the name and sightings of robed figures, there was not that much known about them.

They seemed to work similarly to other evil god worshipers but were somehow able to erase most of their tracks. This relic that caused immediate hallucinations was probably the reason for it. Even tier 3 class holders were affected by them and easy prey.

One thing was clear, this village had been in their grasp for a while now. This relic didn't just appear in the middle of it out of the blue. The buildings looked unkept and the vegetation was overgrown. Yet there were magics in this world that could cause hastened plant growth, which made it hard to put a number on the amount of time they spent here.

'How were these guys able to remain unnoticed for this long? Isn't this village supposed to be a waypoint for many merchant caravans?'

This was the biggest question, if merchants started disappearing along with their wares then this cult would have been quickly discovered. Even this illusory relic needed to have a limit if too many people showed up it would probably be unable to affect everyone. It was probably made for smaller merchant groups in mind instead.

Roland could only imagine a few scenarios in which they were able to evade discovery. One of these scenarios would have someone in power helping them erase their presence. Another one was more far-fetched that involved mass hypnosis but one seemed the most plausible as it involved the merchants leaving this place alive.

'This would explain why they didn't touch the wagons at all but why would they go through all of this just to release the captives in the end?'

He had no idea what these people were thinking and this was not the problem now. A decision needed to be made, when the cultists were busy with the others he could just leave. These people were

certainly assured that their relic's effect could not be broken. They didn't even bother to place any sentries to watch him besides two low level acolytes that weren't even looking his way.

While leaving was the obvious choice if he considered his own safety there was a problem with that. The cultists would certainly track him down all the way to Albrook even if he reported it. He had no idea of knowing who was in cahoots with these people and if anyone would believe him. If his theory was true and these people actually turned up alive later, his statements would be questioned.

'Shit...'

The biggest problem was this guild quest that he was taking. He was noted down as a Runic Mage that was taking a test. It wouldn't take a genius to figure out that it was him that escaped from here. So even when he returned home in a few months he could receive a visit from his old tier 3 acquaintances.

Thus if he wanted to get rid of any future cult shenanigans he would have to free the other adventurers from the spell. Only if they confirmed his story would anyone believe him. Then if they managed to kill all of them, his involvement could be downplayed. Would the cultist try getting to the bottom of what transpired? Certainly, they would but with so many involved he would be given more time to decide about his next step.

Roland gave out a sigh while taking out the two spider drones from his spatial backpack. Along with them he also pulled out two pouches with what looked to be large colored marbles. These were promptly inserted into the golem's compartments where previously was his radar range enhancer.

While he had decided to see what was going on here it didn't mean that he would be hasty. Perhaps fleeing would still be the only option left as he did not truly know the fighting capabilities of his enemies. Yet there was one certainty, there were no tier 3 class holders here.

One of the most important features of his radar was danger assessment. Within the vicinity of this village, he only detected high-level tier 2 enemies. It was possible that a tier 3 could be hiding somewhere but it was not probably. Back in Albrook, he had tested his scanning system out on the guild master and some platinum adventurers.

Tier 3 people had a certain mana fingerprint that was above the rest which made them easy to detect. It was not a measure of strength, just a way to make sure who he was facing. The strongest combatants seemed to be gathered in that one location behind the large spire.

After the two golems were filled with the marbles they were given specific instructions to remain hidden. Luckily spells that canceled out sounds were not that hard to come by. All thanks to this mapping feature the golems would be able to go through this field unnoticed.

Just as ordered the spider drones skittered away into the night while quickly digging up holes into which they dropped a marble into. The moment the colored orbs dropped down they started giving out a faint glow that was quickly hidden by a thin layer of earth.

While his automatons were working hard Roland started preparing. Inside his backpack, he had several pouches filled with more goodies for his enemies. There was also the biggest hurdle that was this massive runic construction in the middle of the village.

He was convinced that if he got too close to it the cultists would probably become aware of his existence. Yet destroying it would be important to his success as even with his current firepower and preparation time there was no assurance of his victory. But he was not alone here, with the help of the other adventurers and the guards his chances of winning increased.

‘That small one was easy to destroy but this one won’t be that easy.’

Without his mana sense, he would probably not be able to see it but there was some kind of protective enchantment at work there. If he unloaded all of his spells on this large double helix it would probably trigger the defensive measure. If he had enough firepower was debatable yet there was another way to disable it.

This was nothing more than another runic creation similar to one of his own. It worked in the same way and even if it utilized some kind of divine energy it was not part of the runic software that could be switched off.

Now there were two ways he could access this runic structure. One would be to go directly to it and go by touch. This would activate the protective measure it had which made this option difficult. Then there was the easier method which he would probably need to go with.

The relic needed some kind of remote control just like a control rod for a golem. This control item would certainly be in someone's possession, probably in the hands of the leader. It would be much easier to figure out the shut of code with through it than to attempt it through the massive construct directly.

Those sorts of items always had an imprinted set of codes that could be sent to the main runic construct. Some like the golem control rods had no protective measures and could be used by anyone holding them. While there could be something locking it to the mana fingerprint of the user, he had enough knowledge to get around it. The bigger problem was to identify the control item.

As he approached the center of the village he continued to notice the vibrations in the air even more. Thanks to being sensitive to mana he could tell that this thing was giving off signals.

‘This control item should be giving off a similar signature like this, perhaps my scanner can pick it up...’

His radar seemed to be coming in handy a lot more than he anticipated. Thanks to him setting it up to go for mana fingerprints he would be able to feed it the mana pattern of this ominous double helix.

Yet, even after going through with that his mapping feature wasn’t as precise as he had wished for. It was guiding him towards the area where all of the people were, it seemed that he would find it there along with a large group of crazy cultists.

Finally, it was time, his main weapon which was the iron staff was now in his hand. On his back was a shield that had various protective barriers to keep him safe from damage. By his hip, he also had his sidearm which was a longsword for whenever someone managed to get close. Most importantly though he had his runic armor that allowed him to shatter the conventions between classes and levels.

Even with all of them together he was still unsure if this was the right thing to do. Escape was still an option yet his current life would be over then. He would need to escape from Albrook and hide away somewhere. The cult would certainly know that he had a runic class now and perhaps even discover his new hiding place in time.

He would spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder or perhaps be forced to return to the noble estate to seek shelter. Then there was Elodia, Bernir, and all the other people that he came across.

Would they run away with him if he explained it all or would they remain in the place they called home? Would the cultists use them to get to him if they decided to stay? This was not something he wanted his friends to ever experience as he knew of the inhumane ways of the Abyssal Cult.

Before he could cloud his mind with any more questions he decided to stop. There was no use asking himself hypotheticals before the battle started. If he didn't focus on the task at hand he would certainly fail. Thus while activating a concealment spell he slowly wandered through the deserted part of the village.

The area he was in was quite silent but as he ventured toward that gathering place strange noises entered through his ears. There were people chanting something, it was very similar to the incoherent babblings of the two guards he had disposed of earlier and only got louder when he approached.

To evade detection he decided to stick to the emptied-out village houses on the side. With the tall grass and bushes there and the help of his spell, it would be impossible for these cultists to sniff him out. Then finally on the other side of the large spire, he saw some of the enemies.

There were about ten of them and they were kneeling outside a large building that was further away. This structure looked like some kind of temple that had been haphazardly constructed. The materials were clearly taken from some of the village buildings that he could see in the background.

This whole structure looked like an unfinished pyramid that was flattened at the top. There were large stairs leading up a few meters to a large open door. The night was quite dark so the light from the inside was illuminating the way for him. More of those strange chants were coming from the temple-like building so he started wondering closer to see if there was a way to get there without going through the cultist from the front.

After he went around to the other side he discovered some smaller openings at the upper parts. Thanks to the pyramidal shape it would not be hard to scale the wall even while wearing his heavy armor. There were no guards to be seen either, the trust these cultists were putting in that relic was impeccable. They clearly didn't expect anyone to be able to get here without being entrapped in the illusion.

'First I need to find an escape route...'

After examining his surroundings he looked at his two golems. These two would be an important part of his plan so they needed to be strategically placed on standby. Only then he started to scale the wall towards the man-sized opening at almost the top of this temple. From what he could tell this was probably made for ventilation purposes.

Finally, when he reached the entrance point he was also able to peek inside. Without the walls in the way, the chants were quite loud. Yet this was not what he was paying attention to. Inside he saw something that he didn't expect, something that he only imagined seeing in horror movies.

The area in the temple was quite large and it was riddled with the sleeping bodies of the adventurers and members of the caravan. In the middle was an elevated platform and on it he could see one of the

caravan guards. He was slumbering on something that looked like a sacrificial altar, yet instead of being stabbed through the heart as a sacrifice something worse was happening to him.

Three priests were gathered around him, one to his left and another opposite while someone that looked like the leader was directly looking down at him. They were chanting something sinister while holding a slug-like creature in their hands.

The creature was about five centimeters in length with strange tendrils coming out from its top part. Its head looked like it belonged to some type of leech with many teeth. As the chants continued a strange black shroud of energy surrounded this creature that gave out a strange high-pitched scream.

‘What are they doing to these people...’

Soon enough the leech-like creature was passed onto the main priest that started lowering down towards the passed out man’s face. One of the side cultists leaned over to spread the man’s closed eyes. Then the moment the creature made contact with the man’s eyeball its many tendrils shot out towards it.

Roland was taken aback by the sight of this thing quickly wiggling inside of the man’s eye socket and disappearing into it. He had no idea what the purpose of that thing was but he was certain that it didn’t bode well for the people gathered here...