

## Runesmith 213

### Chapter 213: Trying to be sneaky.

‘What are those creatures, the radar isn’t picking them up as monsters... are they too small to be registered, or are they part of some kind of spell?’

Roland was above ground and looking through a ventilation opening down into a large chamber meant for occult rituals. One of these was apparently taking place, the whole area was riddled with passed out people and more figures from the Abyssal Cult that he was familiar with.

After making his way here to find the control item for the large-scale double helix device he found something he never expected to see. Small leech-like creatures were being inserted into people’s eye sockets. Just a few seconds one of them vanished into a guard’s eye and besides a little bit of blood, there didn’t seem to be anything off.

Instantly his mind went racing to figure out what was going on. After the run-in with the Abyssal Cult all those years ago he had gone through extensive research on the subject. Yet there wasn’t much information about their real purpose besides the usual disappearances and murders.

It seemed that the calling card of this cult was this double helix relic. With a magical device that could knock out even people at tier 3, it was easy for the cult to go unnoticed. Roland didn’t have access to much information, most of it was clearly being hidden away by the information guilds and other powerful existences.

They were not informing the commoners about facts concerning cults probably to not have widespread panic. Most of the second-hand information that was passed by word of mouth didn’t amount to anything. Even when some cultists were apprehended they were taken away by the governing lord's forces.

The only thing he could do was to spend large amounts of money at the thieves guild that sold information. Even with that, there wasn’t much on the cult, they mostly evaded curious gazes. Not even corpses remained in place and they vanished into the night after carving out their signature symbol. Without it most of the cases would not be identified and the afflicted would not even know if their loved ones had actually died.

Roland had witnessed firsthand what these people were capable of. That one warlock that could transform into a giant monster was probably responsible in some way. The merchant group that existed in Edelgard disappeared in a day without a trace. If he didn’t get out of the illusory world back then he along with his old boss would have done the same. Luckily the old gnome had some powerful bodyguards that could contend with the cult assassins.

There was no word of any incidents like that even when trying to get information through the thieves guild. Mostly there were just rumors of events happening that didn’t seem to be related to each other. There were many assassination groups working in the kingdom and the cult had a good reputation yet there was no mention of these wiggly things they were inserted into people.

‘That looks like some kind of parasite? What’s its purpose... take over the host body to produce more or is it something else?’

While observing the gruesome scene in front Roland came to a conclusion. He had heard about various ways of controlling other's minds and perhaps this was one of them. The way the little leech-like creature went through the eye socket without harming the person made it seem that the cultists weren't aiming to harm the people.

If they just wanted them to act as some parasite breeding hosts then they were going through a lot of hassle. Why would they leave the whole caravan mostly untouched? They were probably going to place these people back onto the carts later on.

'Is this some kind of body-snatcher scenario or something?'

While he did try to figure out what the purpose of those bugs was, this was not the time for his contemplations. Down below part of the adventurers and even regular travelers were already put through this dark ritual. If he didn't do anything all of them might become his enemies.

If the parasites could actually control their hosts was a big possibility. His main plan was to get the control item and then free the adventurers from the illusion they were in. After this was done he wanted to use their help to take out the cultists. On the other hand, if all of them turned into some mindless zombies he would only back himself into the corner.

'Those guys seem to be fine for now but...'

In the background, he could see some of the adventurers behind hauled over. Dalrak and his small group were sprawled out next to each other. Orson had a strange smile on his face, it was as if he was having the best dream of his life. Grisalde on the other hand looked to be next in line for the ritual and the Spirit Spearman was right behind her.

'These guys are really convinced that nothing can awaken these people... I guess I should make my move.'

After going through the temples inside he had also discovered the item that he was looking for. The runic device outside was giving out strange mana patterns that he had stored. After a quick search, he had identified an item in there that he was looking for.

Name:

Lothor L 139

Classes:

T2 Dark Shaman L39

T2 Dark Priest L50

T1 Dark Acolyte L25

T1 Cleric L25

It was in possession of this man, this seemed to be the leader of the group that they all gathered around. At first Roland thought that it was the occult-looking staff in his hand but it was devoid of any

runes. The only item fitting the job was a strange medallion that he was wearing around his neck. It had a double helix symbol in the middle along with many tiny runes.

This would be his assault target which made things difficult. He was the person holding out the little parasites while the other dark priests chanted. What he needed to do was get to that medallion, through it in theory he should be able to send a signal to disable the large relic.

Roland considered blasting the large spire with spells and some enhanced magic but he wasn't sure if he could blast through its defenses. The double helix tower was surrounded by some kind of mana shield that protected it from harm. The amount of mana he would need to put into a blast to get through it would be immense.

It would surely drain his reserves and put him at great risk if he failed. Thus he decided to go with option B. While this might have seemed like the more difficult task he had a few helpers to aid him. The two golems that he had taken along for this adventure were already getting into place.

'Here goes nothing.'

...

Without further ado, the haphazardly created plan of his was triggered. The two shiny spider drones were quick to follow the instructions that their creator gave them. From within their bodies, pointy rods started to slide out. They had cylindrical shapes while becoming thinner at the end. They were all covered with runes that at this point in time were shining blue.

The drones lowered their center of gravity as they went low. Soon the runes traveled up the rod coming out of the top of their body to activate the spell effect. What shot out were simple mana bolt spells and while their aim was mostly to distract, killing some targets was not off the table.

On the outside of the temple, there were several cultists that continued to chant. But soon enough they awoke from their trance by having their bodies being punctured by concentrated bolts of mana.

"GAh..."

One of the men screamed while falling down to his knees. The chanting cultists here were not of high level even a simple mana bolt from a spider drone was enough to maim them if the target didn't move. None of them were prepared for this but there were far too many targets to shoot down. After the second cultist went to the ground there was an uproar which was followed by the emerging of more targets.

"Brothers and sisters, we are being attacked!"

While some of the cultists remained kneeling on the ground some others emerged from the side. The sound of shouting and screaming soon got loud enough to reach the ears of the people inside of the temple. This caused the dark ritual to be paused right before a certain parasite made its way inside of a large muscular woman's eye socket.

"Who dares interrupt the secret baptism! How could anyone get through the dark lord's blessing? Is it someone from the golden order?"

The main dark priest started shouting while the outside was being bombarded with mana bolts. The other acolyte's that were there abandoned the sleeping bodies and turned to their leader. Even while the shouting was happening outside they didn't seem to react as they just waited.

"We do not know..."

"Fools, go outside the baptism can not be interrupted!"

While the few priests on the platform remained in place the others started rushing out. There they saw two hard-to-spot shiny spider golems. The two medium-sized constructs were hard to spot due to the various enchantments that kept their bodies somewhat shrouded in the night. Yet due to the constant mana bolt salvos, they could be recognized even by these priests.

But as soon as everyone rushed out the golems halted with their assault and quickly retreated behind the evil spire. The dark acolytes quickly followed after, in their hands they were mostly holding daggers, bows, and various other light weapons. While not many, there were some with magical staves that were able to protect their allies with some quick mana shields.

The spider drones weren't as fast on foot as the people chasing them. They were soon discovered on the other side by the maddened cultists. Everyone here was quick to charge before the enemy constructs could continue with the magical assault. However, the first cultist had a rude awakening from his angry charge, as the moment he was a few meters away from the golem an explosion occurred.

A large loud bang shook the area as the man's whole leg exploded along with the patch of earth under it. This man might have been the first casualty of the trap but he was not the only one. The maddened cultist had not paid attention to where the spider golems were leading them. Now they found themselves around a hidden minefield and soon enough the first explosion was followed by a second one.

"ARGh..."

"Uoghh..."

It was a strange sight to see, part of the cultists didn't seem to care for their health at all. They continued to rush towards the escaping spider golems and stepped into the placed runic mines. Only a few of the higher-ranked ones quickly stopped as they saw the carnage unfold before them.

"Stop you fools!"

The mindless charge caused a lot of casualties but as soon as one of the few dark priests shouted the others instantly halted. It was as if these lower leveled acolytes followed through with their orders blindly even if their lives would be ended in the process.

"Use your bows!"

The man in charge was holding a magical staff in their hand. The moment the dark acolytes stopped with the advance the golems started attacking them with mana bolts again. But the leader was quick in reacting, while chanting he produced a barrier between himself and his people to block the incoming projectiles.

Even when the smaller golems performed strange maneuvers there were unable to evade that many projectiles going their way. Spears, arrows, and even some explosives were coming their way and soon enough they were down on the ground. Even then they continued with their assault, the mana bolts only stopped after the last blow was delivered.

The victory was assured, the mechanical contraptions had been defeated. Yet as the dark priest was looking at the destroyed automatons he felt that something was wrong. This was quickly followed by a revelation as he looked towards the dark temple in which a light show was taking place.

All of them quickly rushed back while not even caring if some of the mines took out another batch of acolytes. When they arrived on the scene they were greeted by a large magical orb that was formed at the top of the ceiling. This orb was spinning around and constantly releasing magical bolts of energy.

The dark baptism had been clearly interrupted, the dark priests performing the task were chanting out loudly while protecting themselves with magical shields. Everyone was in disarray as the constant bursts of light were making it hard to see.

“It’s coming from there! Quickly my brothers and sisters, protect the temple of the Lord!”

There was clearly a mage sitting up there and casting this spell. It looked like a magical staff was above them and someone was holding onto it. Thus after a few shouts, everyone took aim for the area above their heads to bring down this intruder.

Dark orbs of energy formed around the dark priests that took the shape of skulls. With their enemy now identified the magical projectiles quickly made their way up towards the target. The skulls promptly exploded bringing part of the roof along with them. Their victory was assured as the orb of light above them quickly diminished in size and vanished.

But instead of the body of an enemy hitting the ground there was something else. It was clearly a magical runic staff with a large gem on the end but it had a strange apparatus attached to it. The shape was rectangular and when it fell down to the ground the inside produced some cylindrical-shaped objects that did not explode.

“Wait... where is the Head Priest?”

Everyone looked around but to their surprise, their leader was down on the ground. There was a wound in his back which indicated that he had been stabbed through it.

...

‘Well, that seemed to have worked but I probably don’t have much time before they find me.’

Roland was now hiding within one of the abandoned buildings. In his hand was the runic medallion that he had taken from the body of the head priest. The plan was simple, while they spider golems distracted the cultist he would take the item in question.

This was easier said than done as even after they had started the distraction a lot of people remained inside the dark temple. While he could have jumped down and battled it out he would not have any time to work on this medallion. Thus he had used a second diversion that utilizes his previous mass guiding spell.

After marking all of the remaining cultists he had lodged the magical staff into the wall. In his backpack, he had a spare battery pack to which he could connect this staff. While it continued to churn out spells he quickly made his way towards the second ventilation opening on the other side. Then during the chaos that ensued, he sneaked up on the priest to take him out. The man did not expect to get stabbed from behind.

'I got their attention now...'

Roland could hear various maddened shouts outside. His deception had been discovered and they were now looking for him. It was time to quickly decipher this contraption, if he was unable he would need to go against a small army of angry cultists.

With how they were able to protect themselves with magical barriers they would not be easy targets for someone like him. Without the aid of his ranged spells to clear out the large number of meat shields, he found it unwise to confront them just yet. But he did not panic, the runic medallion in his hand was already being deciphered and soon enough he would wake his companions...

#### **Chapter 214: Hacking some runes.**

"We must retrieve it, find the intruder!"

After the head priest had been stabbed in the back by an unknown assailant the whole place was in an even bigger uproar. A few deaths had occurred during the obvious diversion but there were still many angry cultists around. They quickly noticed the treasured magical item that adorned their leader's neck was missing. This was not something that could leave this place, some of their darker secrets were attributed to that item.

"Find this heretic, they could not have gone far!"

This was the truth as Roland had to duck into a nearby building after his trickery was discovered. Time was of the essence, if he couldn't figure out the inner workings of this strange medallion he would be unable to wake up everyone from their slumber. Without his allies, it would be difficult to escape as the number of cultists was too much for him.

\*KABOOM\*

A sound of an explosion entered his ears and was followed by a cry of a cultist. When retreating he had spread all the remaining explosives around this area he was in. It was clear that he didn't have much time as they were coming this way. Soon they would probably figure out that he was in this house.

Thus he quickly activated his rune smithing skill to access the internal structure of this strange magical device. Luckily for him while the large double helix outside was in possession of a greater rune or above this one wasn't as intricate.

'Good, it's just a high-grade common rune, where is the structure that is responsible for communicating with the main relic?'

From his experience, he knew that if he tried to activate this thing with his mana it would go sideways. This had been clearly made with the dark priests in mind and was attuned to their special mana

fingerprint. Perhaps it also had a bit of evil god energy mixed into it that would not be possible to recreate by someone not in the cult.

Roland knew all of this as he had already created similar long-ranged tools that worked like remote controls. After some fiddling he had found the correct structure, now he only needed to go around the password that only allowed cultists to use it.

This was a delicate process that normally was not to be rushed. What he needed to do was to alter the structure to fit his mana fingerprint instead. This would cause a large change in the structure that could introduce other mistakes into the runic item. These would need to be altered as well to access the main program inside and finally send a disabling signal to the double helix-shaped device.

‘Wish those guys could be a bit quieter but I think that I don’t have much time left...’

There was an obvious larger concentration of traps around the house he was hiding in. It was a combination of explosive marbles and other small devices. While some of the spells only exploded taking out the feet or whole legs of the cultists, some were more complex.

Right at this moment as Roland was altering the medallion, the cultists were witnessing another mana bolt trap. After getting in range that didn’t require stepping into it, the spell caused the marble to jump upwards. Then instead of a regular explosion, it caused something akin to a shrapnel grenade to go off.

This depending on the opponent would cause less or more damage. Luckily they were humans that had many exposed spots. Without any heavy armor protecting their bodies most of the cultists approaching the building received many deep injuries yet with time they had decided to surround the building he was in.

“I can sense the intruder’s presence, he must be in there!”

Soon about twenty cultists were rushing in like madmen towards the house he was hiding in. Even with the many explosives in their way, they couldn’t be stopped. The dark priests used their spells to protect their foot soldiers from the magical attacks which allowed them to burst through the door.

Yet instead of the intruder, they discovered something else. It was an emptied backpack along with some strange metallic contraption. Before they could realize what it was it started giving out a radiant glow which soon blinded everyone there.

“R-retreat!”

It was too late even though the dark priests that were standing in the back created a barrier around their foot soldiers still the ensuing magical explosion was too strong. The entire building was taken out along with all the people that had rushed inside. The ground shook for a moment and alerted everyone to this position.

‘There goes my backpack...’

Roland had quickly tackled down one of the walls while surrounding himself with his own protective barrier. Now he was running for his dear life while still working on the magical item in his hand. His cover was blown and he had gone through all of his explosives.

“There he is brothers!”

'Shit.'

The explosion had brought every cult member to this position. His armor that was constantly giving out a runic glow was easily spotted. But this was not the end, he still had a chance as finally, he was able to jerry-rig this medallion while the whole village was after him. The only problem was that due to this hastily put together solution, he needed to make his way back towards the main relic.

It was time to make his last big push so finally, he took his kite shield. While lowering his head behind him he started running. Unbeknownst to his enemies, this protective shield had a handy feature. On the front, there was a small orb, a tiny golem eye that fed information directly into his helmet. This allowed him to sprint toward his destination without the need of peeking his head out.

Even when the bolts, arrows, and skulls made from dark mana flew his way he was able to defend against them. With a protective barrier around his front, he was able to charge through his enemies towards one destination. Yet to the cultist he was only boxing himself in as soon enough they surrounded him around their great relic.

"You have nowhere to run heretic, you will tell us how you were able to awaken from the dark dream!"

"Oh, will I now?"

Roland's back was now facing the large tower that was still active. Even now he could feel the strange waves of energy radiating from it. The cultists seemed to increase in number, some of them were occupying the houses only coming out when an intruder was spotted.

Now the whole village was out for his head, with how many opponents were here even with his armor this would be an uphill battle. But before they could charge toward him he held up the precious item that they wanted.

"You want this?"

The moment the cultists saw the medallion they stopped in their tracks. He knew that they didn't want this item to be destroyed but they would probably not let him leave with it either. However, this was just another small distraction, while holding it out in front of his body he activated a small spell.

This spell wasn't meant to damage but blind his opponents as it was just a concentrated flash of bright light. The medallion was just used to get the cultists to focus their eyes on this one spot. Then as the flash of light momentarily disabled their advance he pushed the altered runic item towards the double helix relic. Only when the two objects were touching each other could he deactivate it.

"You will regret that heretic!"

It didn't take the abyssal cultists long to recover from this little distraction, when they came to their enemy was still there. He had taken up a strange position on the ground with his kite shield's bottom end touching the ground while he was kneeling down. Soon a large blue barrier of light surrounded his whole body.

The maddened cultists quickly rushed towards the man that was clearly just stalling. Yet the moment they got too close they were repelled by the shield he had produced. Their cursed daggers were bounced back along with their spells that only caused the shield to crack slightly.



'Was this the right choice? Will they wake up in time before they can get through my shield?'

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"Hehehe... take this!"

"Huh? Ey, what are ye doing back there?"

"What the? Where did the tits go? What is this?"

A rather surprised Orson was looking at a dwarf posterior that he was holding with both his hands. The large village girl breasts that he was just playing with turned into his adventurer's partner's posterior that he was now fondling. Almost instantly he jumped back in horror just to collide with another random body he was on.

"Get off me!"

"Hey who stepped on me?"

"What the hell is this place?"

Soon the voices of many were heard by everyone here. Orson looked down to see that he, along with Darlak, were on top of a pile of people. It was a mix of adventurers and regular passengers that he had gone on a transport mission with.

The last thing that he remembered was him having a nice time with a voluptuous village girl. These people had left a long time ago while he had decided to remain here along with his party members. Both of them had hit it off with the locals and even had planned to be married soon.

"T-there is something wrong here... what are those creatures?"

Senna called out from the side, she was down on the ground and looking into some kind of basin of water. There was a small flight of stairs in the middle of this place that led up to some kind of ritualistic altar. On this altar, the large barbarian woman was sitting with a confused look on her face.

This was not the strange thing as Senna pointed out towards the dark murky water. When he narrowed his eyes to focus he also noticed a large amount of leech-like creatures wiggling around in it. The small tendrils around their bodies were flailing all over the place which made them look quite disgusting.

"Hey, weren't we in that village... but didn't you leave?"

Asked Orson while getting off from the pile of people around him. The question was posed to his halfling party member that quickly made her way towards her two companions.

"The village? Yeah, I was about to win ten thousand gold coins from that stingy merchant but then I woke up here...wait did you hear that?"

Everyone's senses were still a bit groggy after they woke up but soon they heard people shouting. The voices were coming from outside and they only got louder.

"Hear what?"

"Someone just said, 'kill the heretic?' "

Senna's class allowed her to hear a bit further than everyone in her group. She could clearly tell that there was some kind of commotion outside.

"Something is wrong here... luckily my daggers are still here."

"Where is my halberd?"

Dalrak replied while looking around, Orson was in the same boat as his two-handed sword remained back at the caravan.

"My sword is missing too...hey, doesn't that belong to Wayland?"

Orson pointed to the runic staff that was sticking out from the side that was left by Roland as a distraction.

"The hell did all the meat go and what's with all that shouting?"

Finally, Griscalde shouted out while also standing up from her spot on the platform. She had a good view of the whole room below her. Most of the people from the caravan seemed to be here. There were some that weren't waking up though and they all occupied the space to the side of the room.

"Was that some type of illusion spell?"

Before people went outside a certain young woman brought up this possibility. The other adventurers looked at each other and soon began making their way outside. There they witnessed a shocking turn of events. A large group of hooded individuals were gathered around someone, they couldn't make it out from this spot but the person was clearly getting attacked.

"This doesn't look good... all of us might have been affected by some spell caster's spell, everyone get your weapons, expect those robed people to be our enemies!"

The guard captain was amongst the ones that had woken up as well. He was quick to assess the situation and finally everyone that could fight made their way outside. While they were leaving the people that had gone through the ritual remained asleep. Some of the non-combatants remained back to look over them.

Walking them up proved impossible even when they were dragged from the pile outside and fed various potions they were not waking up. That is besides one person, a certain woman's hand started quivering. After more time had passed her body started to rise which caused the remaining people to back away.

"..."

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Roland found himself being assaulted from all sides. Thanks to his mana reserves the shield was quite sturdy but it would not last him forever. He had made a gamble by activating the medallion to free everyone from the relic's effect.

If this didn't work out his only way out would be to rush towards the cultists himself. While he was strong there were too many targets even for him to handle. The moment of surprise was over and his

enemies had their own mages as well. Normal spells would be probably protected against which would put him at a disadvantage.

But he didn't worry as while turtled up behind his shield he was checking his runic radar. There he noticed something important, the dots that represented the other adventurers started moving. He had been successful with his plan and they had awoken from their slumber.

'I need to time it right...'

Thus he continued to wait, only when his allies had finally rushed outside to see what was happening would he have a chance to get to a safer location.

"Hey, who are these cloaked people? Are they from some kind of evil cult?"

The voices of the guards and adventurers started becoming clearer as some of them that still had their weapons appeared behind the large gathering of cultists. Luckily they didn't bother to strip them of their belongings as they were probably planning to send them on their way after inserting those parasites into them.

'Now!'

This was his chance, for a moment his enemies let up with their charge to look behind them. With the pressure lessened he could charge towards the wagons where most of the armaments were still at.

The runes on his armor glew brightly while being mostly concentrated on his legs. With a quick increase in his agility, he finally moved his shield up and charged for the most obvious blind spot in their formation. With enemies coming from behind them the cultists started to become disorganized.

With a lot of resistance, Roland burst forth with all his might. On his way, many robed members bounced off his mana-covered body. The opponents were large in number but they certainly lacked skill in combat. Their equipment was also light which allowed him to bully his way through.

"Hey, you're going to need this."

The first thing he did when appearing at the cart he previously occupied was to grab the large axe. Even without it Griscalde was already knocking out smaller cultists with her bare fists. She had quite a surprised look on her face when her weapon landed right next to her following Roland's throw.

"Kill the heretics, leave no one alive, they have seen too much!"

"Screw off!"

Replied the large woman while decapitating one of the cultists after regaining her weapon. While the abyssal cult members shouted out in a frenzied state they were quite an unorganized fighting force. This could be only attributed to their unwavering belief in the relic that could disable everyone. They did not have the right weapons to go against seasoned adventurers and guards. The daggers they used could not stand against the long spears and blades they were up against.

A battle between the two parties erupted which the higher-level adventurers were winning. With Roland's help, they were slowly driving the enemies into a defensive battle. The few dark priests

surrounded themselves with the lower leveled cult acolytes but even the meat shields were running out and if this continued they would surely lose.

“Brothers and sisters, we must not let them escape, for the dark lord!”

Then as the battle was almost over, the cult members did something that no one expected. Each and every one of them gripped their dagger tightly and plunged it deeply towards their hearts.

“What are these crazy bastards doing?”

Called out one of the adventurers while backing away. It looked as if the enemy group was committing suicide to evade being captured for questioning. Yet there was something strange about this as the two dark priests that had survived continued to chant something. Yet they soon delivered the killing blows to themselves to follow suit. A large pile of dead-robed figures was now drenched in black blood that sunk into the land beneath. Victory seemed assured however before anyone could check a strange occurrence took place.

The pile of corpses started being surrounded by some kind of dark mist. This mist started quickly eating away at the dead flesh which turned gelatinous. The dead cultist turned into some kind of pitch dark blob of mutilated flesh.

“What the hell is that?”

Roland called out while quickly shooting out a beam of concentrated heated energy towards this mass of dark flesh. Though even when the spell cleanly connected the metamorphosis continued to progress until a truly terrifying creature was before them all.

Name :

Abyssal Abomination L ???