

Runesmith 225

Chapter 225: Looming threat.

“Hey, nah bad... haven't I seen ye somewhere afore?”

“No, it must be your imagination...”

Roland shifted himself to the side while trying to hide his face. His decision to not wear his helmet caused an old acquaintance to ask some questions. It turned out that the woman that was this ship's captain was someone that he had a run in a few years ago. She was looking at him in a funny way while licking her lips and this was not the only problem.

“Ey big sis, can I 'ave this one, he be kind o' me type~”

In the past, the woman had tried luring him into his cabin which he refused. Then there was an even greater problem of her having multiplied. Previously he only had to deal with only one strange pirate lady now there were three of them.

They were clearly sisters that weren't that much apart from each other in age. Perhaps after the oldest became the captain she lured her siblings into the trade. One of these sisters was now leaning against his shoulder and grinning like some pervy old man. Even without asking he knew where this was going and if he took the ship then the trip would probably be somewhat uncomfortable.

“Nah fair, ye looted the last one, it's me turn now.”

For some reason no one was asking for his opinion, it was as if it was a given that he would consent to whatever they were feeling. Roland decided to leave the two pirate-like ladies to their fight while focusing on the ship's captain. She was still the decision-maker and it was still safer to go by ship.

“Excuse me...”

“See, he likes me more, can nah compete wit' yer cap'n”

“No..., I just... When is the ship leaving?”

The captain seemed somewhat happy that he came over to her. It seemed that these three sisters liked to compete for the attention of the male passengers. For some reason, they weren't that interested in the sailors around them. Besides these three all the other people here were rugged men. Roland's frame wasn't that much different than of the sailors but his face wasn't as rugged and his skin was more fair compared to the tanned men of the sea.

“We be leavin' in about a week but I wouldna mind if ye join me in me cabin tonight...”

“Uh, I'll have to pass on that...”

“Well, ye be no fun. If ye change yer mind ye know where t' find me, 'til then ye'll 'ave t' wait. The shipment that we needs t' grab won't be dockin' fer a few days.”

“Thank you, I'll be back then.”

Roland already knew that only when the ship was about to leave would he be able to pay for the trip. Until that day came he would need to remain here in this city. While the cult problem was unresolved this was the safest place to be. Solaria's church was here along with a prominent noble house. With so many soldiers, knights, and adventurers even the cult would not be able to storm the city.

'This doesn't mean that I can just relax...'

"Where are ye goin' handsome, why don't we grab some rum at the tavern?"

"Ah thank you but I have something else to do, I'll have to excuse myself."

While walking away one of the younger sisters tried yanking him towards the city. After shaking her off he backed away and headed back. The women seemed maddened by the fact that they were rejected but soon they turned towards some other men that were going down from the stationed ships, it seemed that they were just itching to get drunk and party.

Having fun was not on his mind, he needed to stay here for almost an entire week if he wanted to take the ship towards Vita. Before leaving the docks though he paid another visit to the information booth. Perhaps some other ships were leaving sooner and if a problem arose he could take them instead.

'Nothing is going towards Albrook, I'm really unlucky to come at this time...'

It seemed that all the ships were unloading cargo at this time and the earliest he could leave was in four days. Even then the ship was leaving to the other side of the island and the one after it was going towards the mainland. Apparently, there was some angry sea creature spotted lately which was blocking the way. A group of ships was forming to clear it out but it would also take a few days for them to complete the mission.

'What should I do for an entire week?'

There was not much for him to do here but twiddling his thumbs was not something he wanted to do. For someone that didn't need that much sleep spending a whole week doing nothing would be mind-numbing. He had repaired his armor's runes already and the rest of his equipment didn't suffer that much damage, even his runic rod only needed to get bent back to shape.

'Maybe I should go to the church and get some elixirs, wish I could get my hands on an empyrean crystal...'

The cult was still on his mind and the best way to counter their corruption was divine energy. He had witnessed firsthand how a divine blade made from aura could cause the strange parasitic creatures to turn to vapor. Regretfully he was not someone that could mimic divine energy, it was a skill locked behind worshiping classes.

Yet there were ways of storing this energy, one of such items was called an empyrean crystal. It had various shapes and sizes, depending on the divinity it could even turn black to produce evil energies that demons craved. This crystal was able to store the energy that he required to counter the dark ritual, with its help he might even be able to use divine skills if he managed to decode them with his Runic Eyes.

From the literature that he read it was stated that these crystals formed by absorbing holy energies from their surroundings. This could be achieved in many ways, one of them was actually a secret of the church that was able to produce these items. People theorized that after performing healing miracles the divine mana that was released was being absorbed by something that would later become an empyrean crystal. These would then be used in the production of various holy items, even weapons like swords.

'Would be nice if I could just emulate the divine energy with only my runes, going to the church every time will drain my coffers quickly.'

Roland gave out a sigh while looking into his purse. He needed to get some supplies like mana potions and health potions. Then he needed enough for food and the ship fare. This didn't leave much for him to buy an elixir that could cure curses on the fly. They were one-time use items that could put a person in-dept quite fast.

Back in Albrook, the church was not advanced enough to produce any but here in Reeka, he should be able to get one vial for the road. Thus for the time being he decided to go through the city. While he had gotten some supplies for his trip he was hasty. Now with more time on his hands, he could go through the list slower.

First, he visited the church of Solaria, while he was interested in getting his hands on some elixirs this was not his only reason to go there. With the cultists buzzing around there could be some information that he could receive there.

'So this is the church, it makes the Albrook one look like a little shrine...'

This temple created for worshipping the sun goddess could be seen from outside the city gates. It stood at the same height as the castle that belonged to the lord and was probably founded by the noble himself. People took religion very seriously in this world and nobles liked to be in good graces with the high priests from the church. With deathly curses being a reality, they could assure themselves a quick checkup from a high-level priest if a need ever arose.

It looked more like a large cathedral than a church, in the front there were two large towers and between them was the entrance. The large stairs led up to it and the circular window with stained glass above it was fashioned to look like the sun. Above this window, he could see a statue of a woman that resembled what the people here believed Solaria to look like.

Roland wasn't sure if these gods really existed or were just a representation of some skills. To his knowledge, this representation of solaria was created after some pope used some powerful skill that apparently summoned the god to aid them against some demon in the past. Was it an actual god or was it just some summoned creature similar to the ones summoners could call down was the question.

No one was stupid enough to call the believers out on their gods. The worshipers were lunatics in Roland's eyes but even he could not deny the existence of supernatural creatures. He was proof of something outside his understanding existing as he came to this world from another world and was now able to produce magical arts that went against everything he had learned there.

'It looks quite busy, is it normal for that many church knights to be here?'

The first thing that he noticed was a group of armored knights that looked similar to the ones that he met when escaping the forest. They were just standing around the whole church as if they were expecting something to happen. People were still coming in and donating money, the side that he entered was meant for the merchants and nobles.

'Perhaps this is normal...'

Roland wondered if the cult activities were the reason for a large number of church knights here or if it was just due to not wanting the commoners with no money to venture through this entrance. A far smaller chappel existed on the other side through which the less fortunate could get their prayers answered. This didn't sit too well with him as they were clearly segregating the people by class.

Complaining about the status quo was not why he was here. Thanks to his job he was someone with a lot of money, paying a few silver coins to get through the front gate would make the experience faster. The acolyte held out a tray to which he dropped the minimal amount of money that was required, then he ventured into the large chapel.

The place was covered in silver and gold patterns. The large windows were created to allow the natural sun to illuminate the whole area. Then there were a few statues of their goddess along with some angels similar to the valkyries from his past life. With the help of his mana sense, he could feel that there was a high concentration of divine mana in this place, a lot more than he was used to in the other churches he visited.

But he was not here to admire the nice architecture, what he wanted was to get a cheap elixir to help him with any potential curses that awaited him in the future. After a few glances, he noticed a side room with a few Solarian nuns that were doing just that. They had shelves lined with various concoctions one pricer than the other.

"I wish to buy a divine elixir that works against curses."

"Praise the sun."

The nun welcomed him and after presenting him with a few options he was quickly done with his purchase. It was quite surprising how well trained these acolytes were at peddling their wares. He needed to constantly be on guard as they tried pushing the higher potency potions on him to make more money.

'Somethings definitely got them spooked, could they be expecting the cult to make a move?'

His reconnaissance mission was over and he discovered a few things. The number of soldiers was concerning, were they just being cautious or were they preparing for war? If they were expecting a large number of cultists to appear soon this would explain the tight shift they were running.

The amount of divine mana was also telling him a story. He knew that those squiggly worms could not survive long when exposed to them. Perhaps if an infected walked into this church their affliction would become obvious to the priests here.

'Loreena didn't explain much about them but It does seem that those buggers can lie dormant in a person for a while.'

If someone started getting a headache and dropping down to the floor it could be one sign of being corrupted. But could those bugs affect the host's brain before becoming active? Would they do something if the person decided to go to a church filled with energies they disliked before it happened?

After discovering that the church was on high alert Roland went on towards the vendor stalls with dried food and water. There was not much that he required to survive and beef jerky was enough to last him for weeks. Due to Elodia's good cooking, he had been spoiled slightly but this didn't mean that he couldn't survive on dried meat for months.

"Well this is problematic, I didn't expect them to be so wary."

"What's problematic?"

"Huh?"

While mumbling some words he heard a familiar voice. It was a halfling along with three other adventurers that he thought he ditched after completing his mission. He was now in a restaurant, spending the day walking around the city and getting supplies was quite tiresome in heavy armor like this.

"We meet again, it might be fate."

Said Dalrak while making himself at home at the empty table Roland was occupying.

"Fate my ass, this place just has the cheapest food from this area, we were bound to run into each other."

Said Orson as he sat down next to his dwarven comrade. Even Grisalde was here, she only nodded while sitting down next to him as if it was the most normal thing to do.

"What's with the long face? Oh I forgot, it's just how your face is"

Senna was the last one to sit between the two groups, it was as if she was the mediator between the gold rank adventurers and the silver ranked ones. As always Roland remained mostly silent but their company wasn't as uncomfortable as he remembered. Perhaps he was slowly growing accustomed to other people but this didn't mean that he wasn't thinking about just walking out the door when they started acting stupid.

"So, did you decide on your next destination, if not how about you come with us to the dungeon, we could use a mage like you in the team?"

Senna spoke up while the others called over a waitress to bring them some food. This was not a surprising proposal as he was already a gold rank adventurer. People of his rank would have an easy time finding work as they were proved specialists with one foot in the tier 3 region.

"You want me to join your party?"

"Interested? We'll give you a good deal! You might be a gold rank but I and the boys will join you there soon too. "

The others smiled as it was the truth, if they stayed in this city and trained in the dungeon they could probably reach level one hundred in a short time. Then a full party of five gold adventurers could be created to challenge harder dungeons like the super dungeon that this island was famous for.

It was not such a bad deal as he already knew these people. Forming teams wasn't only about the number of levels each adventurer had, there always needed to be some trust involved. This could be created in various ways but some reassurance that a person would backstab you during a dungeon expedition was needed for a long-lasting party. The longer a party lasted the easier fighting monsters became as with teamwork came improvement.

"I will have to decline, I need to return to Albrook."

"You do? What does Albrook have that this city doesn't? The women are better, the alcohol is miles apart and even the dungeon here is a C+!"

This time Orson answered, this city was clearly superior but Roland had another life there, adventuring was only his side job to fall back on if something went wrong with his shop and to get stronger.

"Wayland is just playing hard to get, leave the talking to me!"

Senna on the other hand grinned after hearing his reply. From Roland's perspective, the halfling had probably mistaken his motives. He wouldn't be surprised if she thought that he only wanted more money. With being a mage class holder he would easily be able to join proper gold rank teams that were already established. Yet before he was able to receive the sales pitch something happened.

"W-what was that?"

From the distance, he could hear people shouting at something. Those shouts were followed by a strange low pitched howl. He was clearly not imagining things as everyone turned their faces to where the commotion was coming from...

Chapter 226: Here we go again.

"By Solaria's tits, what the hell was that?"

Orson called out while grasping his ears. The strange sound made the entire restaurant shake with the people inside. The windows were shattered along with dust being pushed into the building as if an explosion went off outside. Roland on the other hand was fast to grab the helmet that he had attached to his hip and put it back on.

Quickly he activated his radar to see if there were some problems in the vicinity yet due to the large number of nearby people it was hard to make out anything. The only thing that he could confirm was that there weren't any monsters in the vicinity.

"That sound came from far away..."

Commented Senna that had begun to move towards the shattered window to peek out. The others along with Roland weren't far behind her. While they all were armed none of them chose to pull out their weapons just yet. They were still in a large city filled with soldiers if there was a problem with some terrorists then it was up to them to protect the people and not the adventurers.

“There is nothing there... where did that sound come from?”

Grisalde asked while being confused. It wasn't only them, most of the people that were in this restaurant decided to look outside. There they only saw some people holding their ears while getting up from the ground. It didn't seem that it was a magical attack as there was no damage in the vicinity, the only clue was the strange howling sound that caused some of the windows to shatter.

“Something is coming, cover your ears!”

Senna shouted out which made Roland activate a protective barrier of blue mana. While it was meant to defend against physical and magical attacks it would also work against shockwaves produced by sound. He made it in the nick of time as another strange soundwave connected with the surroundings that shattered all the windows that had remained intact previously.

“The hell is that coming from? Is it outside of the city... no it's coming from the sea?”

Orson cried out while grimacing as he didn't have a mana shield protecting his eardrums. Just as he said the sounds were coming from a faraway location and judging by the destination it was coming from where the city port was. Yet buildings were covering their view from seeing further.

“Is someone attacking the port? Who would be dumb enough to do that?”

Dalrak commented while scratching his beard. The city wasn't small and it probably had a large force of soldiers and tier 3 class holders protecting it. Unless it was a large force of invaders they would not be able to survive the counterattack.

“Could someone be setting off bombs as a distraction?”

Orson proposed a solution that was plausible but not very probable.

“That doesn't sound like bombs and it's coming from beyond the port. Could a sea monster have appeared by the coast?”

Roland added his five cents as the strange sounds could be signs of a monster battle. It wasn't odd for ships to be equipped with large cannons and magical weapons that could kill huge monsters. Though the ships used various ways of hiding away from large monsters from time to time, if one appeared it needed a full subjugation team to take it out.

‘Strange... wouldn't there be some information about it being sighted, would they be able to assemble a battleship big enough to create these loud explosions?’

He didn't like it, the whole thing was suspicious and it also seemed that the sounds were getting closer and more frequent which was probably about to cause some panic. Without enough information he could not make the right decision, he needed to get to higher ground and see what was happening.

“Wait here, I'll go check!”

Senna had apparently the same idea as Roland as she quickly jumped out the window and headed for a large clock tower that wasn't that far. He decided to follow the halfling and even though he could not just climb the building from the outside like she was doing there was the usual way of doing it. Thus

after quickly running up some stairs and ladders, he found himself high enough to see what was happening.

“What the...”

The moment he got up there he had to activate the mana shield for another incoming shockwave. What he saw made his jaw drop as the various howls and explosions were not actually happening at sea level but up in the sky. He had read about flying technology in this world, magical islands that ignored the laws of gravity.

“Oh, you’re here Wayland?”

“Yeah... isn’t that a...”

“It does look like a Solorian Galley but what is that worm thing around it?”

What both Senna and Roland were seeing was a battle between a flying ship and some kind of monster. First, the ship was flying the Sun religion’s flag which was a dead giveaway to which faction it was associated with. It was quite long and made from some shiny goldish metal that could perhaps be orichalcum. To the sides, it had something that looked like wings but one of them was being shoved to the side by some black worm thing.

This creature was in the process of wrapping itself along this flying vessel. Only thanks to some kind of energy shield that the monster was trying to squeeze was this ship able to not be crushed. Yet while at first glance the monster worm seemed to be winning the energies from this ship were burning into its darkened flesh.

A wave of energy exploded from within this flying ship finally driving the creature back. It was forced to uncoil itself, probably saving its life in the process. Thanks to this Roland was able to see this creature in its full glory.

The creature had no eyes, only a huge mouth with a plethora of teeth at the front. Its body was around three times as long as the ship it was chasing. This long body was pitch black with various tentacles with some sorts of spikes that were concentrated closer to where that toothy mouth was. How it was able to traverse the skies was a mystery as it clearly had no wings helping it glide.

‘Wait... what is that?’

With the help of his helmet, he was able to zoom in on the fight that was taking place. He was focused on the flying monster worm that was thrashing its tentacles around while shaking itself off from the flying ship. Roland could barely see something akin to thick straps made from some dark material.

“Wait... is there a cabin strapped to that monster’s back? I can’t really make it out.”

“Oh, so you can tell? Oh right, you have your spells. That’s probably where the tamer is...”

“You can tame a huge monster like that?”

“It must be an exceptionally high level tamer... or perhaps it's a summoned creature?”

Senna gave him an idea of what this could be but this also raised a lot of red flags. The battle in the sky was continuing and the direction they were going was not the city but the forest where the cult's relic was hidden. After putting one and one together Roland realized what this was about.

"Did the cult send this creature?"

"It might be..."

Senna was of the same mind as she nodded. Both of them looked at the continuing battle that was now changing. The ship started using its side cannons to pelt the monsters with some magical spells. Even though the creature was taking some damage it was quickly regenerating the missing limbs that it used as projectiles.

"This doesn't look good. It might be better to leave this damn city before it's too late..."

Roland nodded at the comment as the sky battle was slowly getting further and further away from their location. This was not something at the level of gold ranked adventurers, anyone that was not a tier 3 class holder would probably be nothing but a meat shield.

He could only speculate about the flying ship and why it was there. The relic in the forest was quite large with more length than width. The ship was somewhat longer as well, the church was probably intending to transport the runic device to a safer location. The cult must have quickly reacted by sending this monstrosity to destroy the flying vessel.

The fight in the clouds wasn't the only chaotic thing that was happening. At this very moment, Roland felt a spike in mana coming from the direction of the church. An actual radiant barrier of bright orange appeared around the whole building. The source seemed to be coming from inside and it was clear and effort against any corrupted creatures that could appear.

'Shit... could those cult bastards have gone through with it?'

The cat was out of the bag for the cultists. Roland had convinced himself that the cult that liked to perform their tasks silently wouldn't just go all out against the church here. It would be more logical to wait to gather more information before going nuclear. Even if the church was sending a flying ship, they could have intercepted it when it was transporting the relic in a more favorable location.

Now when they have revealed themselves the church would do everything in its power to stop them. Probably more flying ships and more holy knights would be arriving soon. With that many opponents on the horizon, there was only one way of holding them back.

"Hey... w-what's wrong with you?"

"...ghhhh...."

While thinking about the worst possible scenario he started hearing a strange moaning sound coming from below. There some people were down on their knees and holding their heads. Their screams filled the streets as the transformation started taking place. Strange tendrils started shooting out from their ears and eyes as the Abyssal Larvae were activated.

"Shit, what's happening to those people? Is that some type of zombification?"

Senna asked while focusing her gaze on the large number of the afflicted. Their heads were taking a grotesque appearance while their skin turned a pale gray. The sounds of their skulls bursting and bones being reallocated was truly disgusting. Even if he wanted to help them it was already too late.

“N-no get away...”

“Ahhh... what are these things... run!”

People were screaming as the monsters appeared. The corrupted retained their humanoid shape from the neck down but then turned into pulsating masses of flesh and waving tentacles. One of these tentacles was a lot longer and had something resembling a scythe blade attached to it. This one bladed appendage was clearly its means of attacking and while the main body was quite slow the tentacles were moving at quite the rapid pace.

Abyssal Spine Eater

L 62

The streets quickly turned chaotic as people started running for their lives. The monsters that just hatched had various levels and iterations. Some of the tentacles were thicker and more robust and were probably due to the larvae having more time to grow. These creatures were no joke as anyone below tier 2 would not be able to stand a chance.

“Hey Wayland, stop spacing out, we must go!”

“Ah yes.”

Roland nodded as this was not the time to be gawking at what was happening below. The populace turning into monsters could only be the start of it. Perhaps they were only meant to distract the inquisitors from the relic but this didn't mean that a more dangerous foe couldn't appear again. He was reminded of the tier 3 ball of tentacles they faced in the forest, if these creatures could combine into a stronger form was possible.

‘Why is my luck so bad...’

After coming to this city he had hoped to leave his troubles behind. He was not expecting the cultist to go through with a plan like this in broad daylight. They seemed more of the silent killer types that would try doing their business away from the regular populace seeing them. But they certainly weren't hiding now, the illusory relic must have been important enough for them to alter their plans.

Roland and Senna were lucky enough to have gone up the old clock tower. There weren't many people in it and on the way down they didn't run into any opposition. Only when they arrived at the last floor did the fighting start.

‘I shouldn't use spells too much, I might hit the civilians.’

This was not a dungeon where he could indiscriminately pelt monsters with a large number of spells. He was in possession of deadly force that could easily go through buildings and kill the people that were hiding inside. This was not something that he wanted to have on his conscience.

Thus for the time being he decided to use the sword and shield that didn't find much use in the previous encounters. His shield had various rune patterns on the inside with a glistening outer shell.

On the outside, there was also a golem eye for whenever he needed to see what was going on when protecting his head. The shield had been banged up after the run-in with the cultists in the forest but he had managed to mostly repair it while traveling back.

His first opponent made itself known by a strange screeching sound coming from its tentacle head. It had one large long whip-like tendril with a blade attached to it which was swinging in random directions around its body. The creature was blocking the path outside while approaching a woman that was grasping a child.

While Roland didn't see himself as the heroic type he could not just let a mother holding her child be eaten by some monster. He quickly activated his runic armor to augment his agility so that he could swiftly place himself between the two parties. This was just in the nick of time as the bladed tentacle shot out for the woman's head.

Instead of colliding with flesh, it hit a blue shield of mana that was surrounding his shield. The moment the blade collided Roland could feel his wrist straining slightly. The monster before was only level seventy but its power was no joke. Yet the moment the appendage bounced back he stepped in quickly, his sword was quick to aim for the fleshy part as he sliced the monster's only way of attacking.

A black fountain of blood shot out from the severed tentacle while the creature backed away. Its way of walking was very uncoordinated which made it a very easy target for the slaying. Thus while the fleshy blade was flopping around on the ground Roland continued with his assault. The runic blade that he was holding started glowing red and its blade was surrounded by mana of the flame variety.

With his flaming hot blade, he performed a basic slash that was aimed at the monster's neck. While it tried using the other softer tentacles to protect itself they were far too mushy. Roland didn't feel much resistance after cleaving right through the monster that quickly dropped down to the ground.

'It does look like the head is the weak spot but to be on the safe side...'

Roland recalled a phrase from an old zombie movie that he once watched. It was always better to perform a secondary attack on these types of creatures with regenerative powers. The name of this monster also bothered him so while the monster did a flop forward he stuck his flaming blade into its spine.

"GAHHHhhh"

The moment he did a bunch of smaller tentacles shot out as if they were trying to push his sword out. Yet before they could do anything they were consumed by the magical flames and quickly suffered a critical hit. Only when he received a message from the game-like system did he relax.

Yet this was not over yet, this was only the first of the many enemies that awaited him outside. What were his options here? With the city in a state of chaos, there wasn't much he could do. He could either try to escape to a safe location or attempt to get out of the city.

'Should I try going to the docks or is it too late?'

His old plan of taking the ship out seemed to be in shambles but depending on the time he might be able to make it out. The whole place would be in chaos so the ship captains would probably attempt to leave as soon as possible. These monsters didn't look like they could swim either.

There was an option of seeking help at the church or the noble district but it was very slim. The church had surrounded itself with a holy shield that might not be accessible to the common folk. The sturdy walls and gates at the noble district would be a good defensive position too but he was convinced that they would not let an adventurer like him inside. Which left the docks as one option and then the other would be to abandon the city.

“Hey, Wayland, help me out here we need to go help those three idiots or they might die!”

His deliberation was interrupted by Senna who was peeking outside. While he could try going through the city alone he would need to abandon the small party he was involved with. By himself, he might be able to slip through the streets faster but in a larger group, it was always a bit safer...