

Runesmith 227

Chapter 227: Toasty.

“No, stay away...”

An old man was trembling while a strange humanoid creature that seemed to be missing a head was approaching him. This creature’s head was a mass of squiggly tentacles with one being much larger with a sharp claw-like appendage at the tip.

“The hell are you doing just sitting there?”

The monster swung its thick rope-like tendril toward the old man that just froze in place. Luckily for the man, the attack was bounced back by a large sword that belonged to an adventurer. This man was not alone as a dwarf was right to the side and ready to pierce the monster’s head with a halberd while it was distracted.

“These shits are annoying, why are there so many of them?”

There was a third member of this small party, a large woman that was using a big axe to cleave another one of these creatures in half. These monsters had just appeared all over the place, even in the restaurant these three were staying. This event sparked widespread panic as everyone was running for their lives.

“This must be related to the cult... they look similar to that thing we saw in the village.”

Orson, who delivered another attack on the downed monster, shouted. While the humanoid creatures with tentacles for heads weren’t an exact copy of the Abyssal Abomination they had seen in the village, the structure of their floppy appendages was somewhat similar. The group of adventurers also knew about the head parasites and were able to make an informed conclusion.

“Is this whit happens whin ye git infected by they bugs?”

Darlak looked at the defeated monster and how its head started dissolving into a dark goop. This was quite similar to what happened to the monster Loreena defeated which supported his claim.

“Where did Senna and Wayland run off to and why does this shit keep happening whenever we are around him?”

Orson clicked his tongue while remembering the fiasco in the mines where he almost lost his life. Their life after that encounter wasn’t nearly as deadly until they had a run-in with Roland once more. Now after the third fiasco took place the two-handed swordsman was starting to believe that his old acquaintance was cursed.

“How ‘bout you stop whining like a little girl and kill some monsters instead?”

Grisalde shouted from the side while deflecting a bladed tentacle from another monster. All three of them had gone outside the restaurant as some patrons had turned into these strange Abyssal creatures. To not be stuck in a confined space with beings that flailed their strange appendages at high speeds they decided to jump outside through the window. Now they were fighting for their lives along with some soldiers and other closeby adventurers.

“They went tae that clocktower, tis nae far should we go thare or wait for em ‘ere?”

Dalrak used his shield to back into one of the flailing monsters. Thanks to his smaller height and large tower shield it was difficult for the monsters to get through his defenses. With the monster down on the ground, it was easy to jab his spear into its body but soon he realized that poking anything other than the head would not cause much damage.

“Let’s move, it’s better than sitting here and waiting for the monsters to surround us...”

Orson replied while helping Darlak get rid of the Abyssal Spine Eater. While they had left the restaurant to not be boxed in, the outside space wasn’t that much better. There were a few options and one of them was to rendezvous with their other party members to bolster their forces.

“Have you two made up your mind? I don’t care, we can just stay here, these bastards aren’t that hard to kill.”

Their barbarian friend didn’t seem that impressed with the quality of the opponents she was facing. They were all below level one hundred and didn’t pose that much of a threat. Yet soon enough she would realize that the individual strength of these creatures was not what they should worry about.

“Wait, what are those things doing?”

While looking towards the clock tower where Senna and Roland disappeared the group of three noticed a peculiar scene unfolding. Even though soldiers and adventurers were trying to protect the non-combatants it was impossible. Some of them were being devoured by these Abyssal Spine Eaters.

What Orson had noticed was a larger group of about ten feasting on the flesh of others. Their tentacles slid into the dead bodies which soon after started drying up as if their vitality was leaving them. The thick tendrils that were performing this absorption technique started getting bigger and wider as if the monsters gained more strength. This was followed by a visible increase in the size of those Abyssal Spine Eaters.

“Those things... Are they evolving?”

Evolution was something that happened to monsters when they reached a certain level threshold. It was a slow process that was akin to leveling classes but without the troublesome need of buying a class up a crystal or passing a trial. There were certain laws that governed them but for some reason, these creatures were breaking the logic of this world by reaching smaller evolutions.

The gruesome act continued to unfold before the group of adventurers. It was as if these monsters realized that they would not be able to win against people of the races gathered here. Instead, they all flocked to one location where the pile of corpses was increasing.

Their monstrous heads were covered with strange appendages sunk into all that meat. More and more of the strange beings appeared and practically tossed themselves into this ball of gore. They were devouring not only the dead people but each other as well, forming something more dastardly and similar to what the three adventurers remembered from their visit to the village.

“Shit... we must leave...”

“Aye...”

Dalrak and Orson were in agreement, the creature that was forming there was not something they would be able to handle. It was similar to the abomination that now haunted their nightmares. Even if it was only a lesser evolved variant it wasn't something they could easily combat in this open street where it could absorb more people to heal itself.

"Wait, what's that under the thing... a magic circle?"

Before they decided to jump back they noticed that there was a glowing circle with strange glowing runes under the monster. While they were not magically inclined they had seen some lesser mages perform similar feats. When aiming for a wide-area attack a mage could construct a circle from far away and it would appear on the ground before the spell took shape.

"Hey, it took you long enough, are you two done with your honeymoon?"

"Shut your trap, you drunk bastard!"

Orson smiled as he noticed a certain halfling hanging from the side of a nearby building. It was clear to him to whom the magical circle belonged. With the absence of any chants, it was obvious who the mage performing this spell was.

The magic circle that was blue in color started shifting to orange and then quickly became red. The temperature surged around the area as a pillar of condensed flames appeared from within. The flames burst upwards while quickly changing into the shape of a twister.

The creature that was not formed gave out a wail of pain that sent shivers down everyone's spine. Its tentacles started flailing around in every direction causing widespread damage but the spell continued to burn. Orson along with Dalrak had to cover their faces as the storm of fire expanded in scope while producing tremendous wind.

...

Roland stood there with his sword back in his scabbard. It was replaced by the spell staff that allowed him to perform some spells faster. Senna along with him had returned to the restaurant to search for their friends only to encounter more of those strange monsters. They didn't pose much of a problem for them but were certainly too much for the confused guards and commoners to handle.

After taking out a few they arrived where Orson and the others were. While the group of three seemed to be fine there was a large problem. The Abyssal Spine Eaters were fusing with each other and mutating. He was able to use his identification skill to analyze the creature's name.

The thing had not fully formed when he arrived at his destination. Roland had seen the tier 3 version in action but even a lesser variant was probably deadly. The mass of tentacles wasn't forming as hastily as the one back at the village and it would not be able to finish the transformation.

Thus he decided to apply one of his runic spells. The spell he was using was called 'Firestorm' it was created by combining fire and wind runes together. By feeding it more air the flames would be riled up and forced to circulate around the targeted area to increase the temperature.

If it was possible then he would choose to use a divine spell to which these monsters were susceptible too. Yet without any current knowledge, he went with the closest thing to it, fire. There was a reason

why people in this world decided to burn evil beings as besides the holy element it was good at cleansing abyssal creatures like this one.

Normally this high tier 2 spell would require a mage that specialized in two elements before being created. Roland on the other hand could go around all the requirements with his runes. The only drawback was the increase in mana usage and drop in power compared to the original version. Yet these he was already circumventing by having various skills that raised his MP and increased the damage of runic spells cast by him.

“GUOHHh...”

The monster was burning up before his eyes. It had sealed its fate by deciding to mutate right then and there. At this stage of its evolution, it could not move or evade the powerful spell that continuously burned that dark flesh. Its weak point that was somewhere on the inside of that disgusting body was not as hard to pinpoint as with the tier 3 version of this monster. Thus soon enough the flailing tendrils halted in mid-air and dropped to the ground.

“Damn, is it dead?”

“Yeah, it's dead.”

“Are you sure? Won't it regenerate like the one in the village?”

“No, I'm sure it's dead.”

Roland looked towards Orson that was inching towards the Lesser Abyssal Abomination. After being burned to a crisp its body started dissolving into a dark liquid that was similar to a slime's. It seemed that the creature was similar but was able to keep a more fleshy form than its common slime counterpart.

“Is everyone okay?”

“Aye.”

Before continuing further he glanced at the three adventurers. They didn't seem injured in any way just out of breath after the sudden battle. All the monsters in this area had swarmed towards one location which made it easy to destroy them with one well-placed spell but this battle was not over.

“These things...”

“Hey Wayland what are you doing, we need to get out of here, how about we go to the guild? I'm sure those monsters won't be able to get in there easily!”

Senna shouted out towards him while he approached one of the defeated monsters. This one's head was now just a puddle of black goop but the host's clothes and body were still somewhat there. When going through the city he had noticed something, a lot of these monsters were wearing gear that was sold at the adventurer guild. It was clear to him that it was all due to the village that the Abyssal Cult had taken over. These poor bastards had probably gone through escort missions and been infected by the larvae.

“I don't think that the guild is safe, the whole merchant district is probably infected...”

“What do you mean?”

“Think about it, you’ve seen that village. They had probably been there for many months, maybe even for years, how many people did they infect? This whole city might be done for, we need to leave.”

Senna was shocked as her idea to go towards the adventurer guild was shot down. If Roland was right then those monsters had already burst forth inside of the guild and a massive battle was taking place there. The merchants that traveled through that place always took a large gathering of soldiers and travelers with them.

“Shit, where should we go then? To the church?”

Orson asked while looking around nervously. Even though they had managed to defeat the monsters here they could hear people screaming in the distance. Fires were burning and other battles were taking place. The city guards had their hands full and if they weren’t fast the monsters would start mutating.

“I’m not sure if the church will let anyone in we should probably leave the city by ourselves”

Senna said and Roland just nodded in agreement. That radiant shield was still around the church; it was clear that they were more concerned about their own safety. The protective barrier would probably keep the priests and church safe but deactivating it to let people inside was not something the church was willing to do. Their priority was to keep their assets safe and not the people of the city.

“That’s fine with me, let's just go!”

“Wait you idiot, do you even know where to go?”

Orson placed his sword over his shoulder and was about to step in a random direction before Senna stopped him.

“What is it now, you just said that we should leave?”

“Go where? Do you know where the gate is? Do you think the soldiers will just let us out? What if we run into more of those monsters?”

“You’re annoying, if we run into them we can just kill them!”

Orson smacked his chest as if he had it all figured out while Senna’s eyes twitched. While Roland was keeping out of their argument it was worrying. His mapping device was showing monsters everywhere, some of the dots were larger and confirmed that some of them had started evolving.

The problem was the lack of information, there was an unconfirmed number of these creatures here and it could get worse. What if more of those tier 3 tentacle things start spawning while the golden order was outside the city at the village. When he visited the church earlier he could not see anyone above tier 2. His main worry was that all the strong combatants had left to secure the relic leaving them with a lesser force.

‘Will the city lord come out or will he concentrate his forces on the noble district...’

He didn’t even need to ponder this question as he already knew the answer. There was no possibility of a noble ordering his forces to help the commoners. All the important figures lived in the rich district that

probably was being attacked as well. Only when they had secured it would the noble troops start clearing out the lower districts and the church would also probably only bunker up and wait.

“Does anyone of you know the layout of the city?”

“No, it's the first time we are here.”

Roland posed the question to everyone but he was left with shrugs and head shakes after Senna replied. The city was large and there were probably ways of getting around it while minimizing the risks of being attacked.

‘Shit, there is probably a way of reaching everything through the underground. A city like this must have a thieves guild and underground tunnels to the key locations.’

Senna was a trickster so he assumed that she might have been informed about Reeka's thieves guild. Without a proper guide, they would be forced to go through the monster-infested streets instead.

“Get off her ye fucker”

“Huh?”

During his deliberations, he heard a familiar voice that belonged to a woman that he had met in the morning. It was coming from behind the corner and was followed by a death groan of a monster.

‘Wait that voice, wasn’t that?’

Chapter 228: Down into the tunnels.

“I be like a lot o' things but I be nah mighty into this kind o' play”

A heavy rapier pierced through a monster’s head while producing a loud banging sound. The moment the tip was buried in that mass of squiggly flesh an explosion occurred. Various parts flew in all directions covering a part of the person that had performed the attack in black ooze.

“Arrrgh, I got some o' it on me boots.”

“Big sis,wha' shall we do?”

“What do ye mean, we go t' the dock 'n get the out o' here!”

“But sis, thar are too many o' these things, 'twon't be that easy.”

While a group of three pirate ladies were shouting between each other a certain Runesmith was watching. After clearing out the street before the monster spine eaters could form into an abomination he overheard some shouting.

To his surprise, it was the ship’s captain that he met in the morning along with her two younger sisters. It seemed they had come to the merchant district to get some food just as he did and were now getting surrounded by monsters.

Name:

IsabelaL 126

Classes:

T2 Swashbuckler L26

T2 Fencer L50

T1 Warrior L25

T1 Thief L25

After a quick analysis, it was clear that the woman was not someone that needed protection. Her sisters were below her at similar levels as Orson and Dalrak. The blade she was using brought some old memories back as it was a similar weapon to the one the assassin used when Roland was young.

By using a small explosive rune at the tip it produced an explosion after piercing through the enemy's body. Yet she wasn't a pure fencer which was indicated by the swashbuckler class. There was a certain lack of firearms missing in this world which somehow diminished the usage of that class that got bonuses to sidearms like smaller crossbows. Instead, she was using a shorter blade that looked to be some kind of enchanted dagger.

"Hey Wayland, where are you going? Did you decide on a route or something?"

Before moving towards the next monster-infested street he was halted by Orson and the rest of the group. While he might have not considered himself the leader the rest of them did. After the incident in the village, everyone knew that he was the strongest member of the group. This was enough to put a person in a leadership position even if they didn't want it.

"Um, perhaps but first we need to help those three out."

Roland pointed to the three sisters that were poking the monsters with their thrusting swords. Orson was pleasantly surprised when his gaze landed on the chest regions of the women that were there. Even before Roland gave out an order to attack the two-handed swordsman charged forth.

"My friend, you do have a keen eye!"

"Hey wait..."

It was impossible to stop the other adventurer from charging forward as he already focused his eyes on the prize. The other four people there just glanced at each other while shrugging before moving into an attacking position. Roland, Darlak, and Grisalde just charged behind him while Senna remained in the backline.

After switching to his sword and shield combo Roland began decapitating the nearby monsters. They were much too slow and weak, there was no reason to waste his mana on these sorts of mobs that he could easily slice in half. While conserving his energy their group gained more and more ground.

"Ey, ain't that the handsome scallywag from afore?"

One of the younger sisters called out after spotting Roland's characteristic armor. Soon enough the group of five adventurers was able to push through the turned people. Orson was of course the first one from them to get there and the women there could tell what he was mostly looking for.

“Do you lovely ladies need some help?”

Orson called out in his rugged voice while trying to smile but his facial expression only confused the three pirate women that were there. Instead of replying to him, Isabela looked towards the armored man that was not far behind.

“Ahoy, Ye 'ave me thanks.”

“You can thank me later after we get to your ship.”

“T' me ship?”

“Yes, how about we make a deal, we help you get to your ship and in return, you'll help us leave this city?”

There was no time to bat around the bush. The reason that Roland decided to help these three pirate women was for their ship. The other crew members were probably back at the docks as they were still unloading the cargo when the monsters appeared. This was a gamble as the sailors could have decided to run away on their own without waiting for their captain.

Then there was a second reason he approached the ship's captain. Even if she would not be able to get them out through the docks there were other ways. This was related to her tier 1 class of thief. A woman like her would probably have contacts in the thieves guild in the cities they unload their wares.

Thieves' guilds normally used a web of tunnels that were built underground in the city they occupied. The longer the guild remains there the more places a person can reach through them. Considering that the cultists mostly targeted merchants and adventurers the underground tunnels should be clear of that many monsters.

‘It should be safer than going through these streets at least but it's a gamble...’

“Har har har, so that's wha' ye wants 'n here I thought ye jus' couldn't forget about me.”

Isabela laughed at the reason that Roland gave her. The woman quickly turned towards the approaching monstrosities that even at this very moment were trying to mutate into stronger variants. The city soldiers were all over the place but the number of these creatures was truly staggering.

“Aye, That doesn't sound like a bad deal...”

“Good, are you familiar with the layout of this city? Is there a safer way that could take us to the docks?”

It seemed that Isabela gave it a quick thought. Her gaze focused on the group of five adventurers along with who looked to be their leader, Roland. Quickly the decision was made as she nodded.

“Thar be, follow me then 'n try t' keep up handsome. But try t' keep up or I will leave ye behind!”

“Hey are you finished with your love talk, we need to go, these things are just multiplying and immune to poison...”

Senna tossed a dagger laced with some paralyzing poison toward one of the abyssal monsters but it didn't slow it down at all. Instead, Griscalde needed to cleave it down with her oversized axe. She made

sure to turn to the halfling while grinning after the confirmed kill which produced a frown on Senna's face.

"Yes, we are done."

Roland replied while turning towards Isabela that looked at a building in the distance, then she quickly pointed to it while speaking up.

"We needs t' get in thar"

It was an unsuspecting pub that didn't stick out from the rest. Luckily there weren't that many flailing tentacles blocking their way there so the group charged forward without being reserved. The shouts and screams of many other people filled their ears but in a situation like this, they needed to look out for themselves.

Some time had passed since the transformation occurred and most of the people had already fled. On the inside, as expected they only encountered dead bodies of the unfortunate commoners and more black ooze.

"Behind that door, break it!"

Isabela along with her two sisters looked towards a door that was leading to the back room. Roland looked to the barbarian of the group that just nodded and quickly delivered a powerful kick to the locked door. The door frame buckled under the pressure and managed to stand tall. Even though it looked inconspicuous it was made from quite the resistant wood.

"Hah, can't you even break down one flimsy door? Move over and let a specialist do it!"

"What the hell you on about pipsqueak?"

After a few more kicks it was obvious that Griscalde would not be able to just break it down that easily. Instead of using more power, Senna decided to step in, she pulled out a lockpicking kit quickly and went to work.

"Can you pick it?"

"Who do you think I am? Just keep those bastards off my back and I'll have this lock open in a second!"

Roland didn't know what was on the other side of that door. If they forcefully destroyed an entrance that led into the den of thieves a trap could be activated. It would have been easy for him to blast it open with a strong enough spell but if he triggered some kind of safety that blocked the rest of the way for them it would be inconvenient.

"Just let me..."

"Let's just leave it to Senna, for now, help me guard the door."

Griscalde looked ticked off but after Roland gave the order she retreated to the back. The monsters outside clearly saw the party of eight go into the building and gave chase. Luckily they were quite clumsy in their basic form and didn't pose much threat from range.

This was used to their advantage thanks to the vast array of runic spells that Roland was able to produce. With his iron staff in hand, he created a large number of mana bolt spells that traveled toward their enemies. To conserve his mana he decided to aim for disabling the approaching swarm by taking out their slow-moving legs. When down on the ground they could only crawl and give enough time for Senna to pick the lock.

click

Soon the door opened before them and revealed another room into which they all quickly dived into. After locking the entrance behind them they continued to the lower level where the wine cellar was. Orson moved his sword to the side after not seeing any enemies while also speaking out.

“Is this really an entrance into the thieves guild? I’ve always heard stories about them but never been in one before.”

Inside the wine cellar was quite dark but was quickly illuminated by a rudimentary spell produced by Roland. The three pirate ladies were quite surprised to see an orb of blue light floating out from his palm and sticking to the ceiling but after seeing him use mana bolt spells they also realized that he was a mage.

“Blast ye, thar be no one on the other side, thar best be a switch or somethin' here, help me find it.”

While the adventurers were looking around to see if no monsters were nearby, Isabela started knocking on an unsuspecting wall. This was probably the entrance to the thief-owned underground tunnels. Instead of a password, they were using a knocking code not surprisingly there was no person on the other side.

‘Did the thieves from this pub decide to abandon it for now?’

It wasn’t that surprising that whoever was informed about this place decided to evacuate to a safe location. If they were unlucky then the opening mechanism would only be accessible from the other side. In that case, going through the wall would require a lot of force.

“If we don’t find the switch, can we just blow up the wall? ”

It was already too late to turn back. Monsters probably had started going into the building they escaped in. If they turned around now they would have to go through more tentacles than before or bunker up until the city guards got everything under control.

“I wouldna recommend that, the tunnels might nah last through an explosion.”

Isabela commented while padding down the walls and knocking on them. Sometimes places like this included hidden opening mechanisms. Thieves were occasionally lazy, one of them sleeping through their shift on the other side was probably not that uncommon.

“Hm...”

While everyone was looking around Roland decided to do the same but use his radar system instead. When using more mana he could make it slightly more detailed and also increase the range. Just as he had predicted the floor that they had left was slowly becoming infested with more monsters.

The people from the merchant district would probably flee towards where the soldier's presence was the highest and leave this place empty. Only when some semblance of order returned to the city would he be able to leave, this left the underground tunnels belonging to the thieves guild the only way out.

"Let's see..."

The helmet's eyes gave out a faint glow as he started scanning the walls. He had implemented various detection methods that could inform him about pockets of metal behind rocks due to his visits to the hidden mining area. Thanks to this he noticed something hidden behind a wall, it was a circular object that looked like a crank.

"Could this be it?"

"Did you find something, Wayland?"

Asked Senna as she was peeking around the corner.

"Give me a moment."

Before giving an explanation Roland activated the strengthening feature of his armor. With increased power, he started pushing his armored fingers into the brick wall. There was no time to find the hidden latch for the opening and he had enough strength to just pry the bricks out forcefully.

"Oh, this should be it! I don't see any traps on it, you can go ahead and give it a yank."

He nodded to Senna who examined the lever and crank attached to it. This lever was meant for two hands and perhaps even for two people. With his boosted strength though he was able to make it spin which then produced a cracking sound from the wall that Isabela pointed to.

The grating sound that started coming from the wall was noticeable. The party of adventurers was vigilant, Dalrak placed his shield in the front and waited as the wall was being lifted up. There must have been some kind of pulley system in the wall through which Roland was now pulling the wall up. Luckily after half of the tunnel behind the entrance became revealed no monsters could be seen.

"There is no one there, the thieves either retreated to their guild or escaped outside the city."

Senna commented after passing through the half-opened wall. With her short height, she was able to just walk through it while everyone else needed to wait for Roland to pull it all the way up.

"Let's go then! If we be lucky we'll be back at me ship in a jiffy."

Isabela let some of Roland's party members check the tunnel for enemies before going in herself. Soon everyone was going through while leaving Roland to hold the lever in place. It didn't have a locking mechanism, this would normally force him to sprint towards the entrance before the wall slammed down shut.

"I got it, Wayland."

That is if he was alone, with Orson's and Grisalde's help he wouldn't have to. When he lowered the sliding wall slightly both of them used their muscles to hold the entire thing up. To their surprise even

when done by both of them the thick slab of rock was heavier than it looked. When Roland was passing by them he noticed some strange looks he was receiving due to his surprising strength.

“Are you sure that you are a Rune Mage and not some kind of Berserker?”

Orson asked right after dropping the wall behind Roland. Both he and Griscalde were now slightly out of breath and wondering how one man was able to use a lever crank to pull this heavy wall up.

“Don’t be silly, let us continue the faster we get to the ship the quicker we will be safe.”

“Aye, let's go.”

Dalrak called out from the front as he took up the tanking spot, next to him appeared a large barbarian lady with an oversized axe. Between them, Senna appeared, her trap detecting skills would be quite useful when traveling through these tunnels.

The three pirate women remained in the middle while Roland and Orson protected the rear from any potential surprise attacks. With this composition, they moved towards the uncharted territory, what waited for them there no one knew.