

Runesmith 229

Chapter 229: It's too quiet...

"The shit is this, I was supposed to have some fun with the local girls not be stuck in some shitty dump corridor."

"Have fun with the local girls? You mean the local whores"

"What's the difference?"

Orson spit on the floor while narrowing his eyes. There were no torches in this place so it was hard to see what was ahead of them. The party of eight people was slowly going through the underground passages with only Roland's mage light as a source of illumination.

"Can you two be quiet, we don't know if this place is even safe, what if there are more of those strange monsters here?"

Senna commented while the eldest of the pirate sisters spoke out.

"Don't worry, those bastards shant be able t' get here that easily. All the entrances shall 'ave been closed 'n I bet everyone be jus' waitin' fer it t' blow o'er."

While everyone was talking Roland was sure to use his parallel thinking skill. Part of him was constantly looking at his radar while another was paying attention to what was happening in front. Even though what Isabela said was true this didn't mean that this place wasn't dangerous.

Roland didn't voice his concerns but he wasn't sure if these underground passages were truly safe. Considering that the cult had so many infected in the city it wouldn't be surprising if they had some kind of secret base here as well. It would be quite bold of them to create one so close to a Church worshipping the goddess of the sun.

'Am I overthinking this? Could they hide themselves from tier 3 paladins and high priests in this city? But they weren't able to discover the infected ... '

The Abyssal Cult was a secretive bunch that certainly liked to hide away in the shadows. It was possible that they had ways of hiding from the church if they decided to infect this many people in a large city. Perhaps their big plan was to infest more of the populace before finally attacking when there were enough forces, yet for such a thing to be feasible, they would need some kind of foothold.

'... and what better foothold than a base in the city that they want to take over...'

"Hey Wayland, you've been awfully quiet, did you figure something out?"

"Uh, no let's just quickly head toward the docks and get out of here..."

"You don't have to tell me twice, how much longer is this passage?"

Orson asked the question to Isabela that just smiled while replying.

"We be arrivin' at the market soon."

"Hope we can get some rum thar, me throat be gettin' parched."

“Don't get ahead o' yourself Eve, better ready yer rapier.

One of the sisters of the ship's captain that seemed to like alcohol was a bit excited when they were going from around the corner. If what they were telling was true then they should arrive at the black market area after passing through another checkpoint.

“Well shit ... “

Yet after they went around the corner instead of a door or some kind of passage they run into some rubble. Roland as usual was looking at his radar to see if there were any monsters or humans behind this collapsed opening. To his surprise, there was nothing that his device was picking up.

“That's strange...”

“O' course, it's strange, why would they collapse the entrance t' the market?”

“Are you sure that the black market is behind here?”

“Aye.”

“There are no life signs behind this rubble, don't you think it's odd that there aren't any people at something important like the black market?”

“Wayland is right, I can't sense anything either, hey dwarf can we get through here?”

Senna turned to Dalrak who as the resident dwarf had a keen eye for collapsed tunnels. Without needing much time he moved towards the rocks and could quickly tell that the blockade wasn't deep.

“We shuld be able to git through here, not many of the rocks hav' fallen.”

“What are you all worried about, so what if there is no one there, just makes it easier for us to pass!”

Orson smiled while moving towards the rubble while others just looked at him funny. Yet even Grisalde wasn't that worried as she decided to help her new party member with moving the rocks. With so many strong people here it would be quite easy to clear out a path for them to pass through.

“Well, I guess we are going in, I'll be relying on your magic support then.”

Senna just looked towards Roland that wasn't sure what to make of this. It was clear to him that a place like the black market would be well protected. There should have been enough high-level bodyguards to kill a larger group of the monsters, that is if they weren't the ones that had turned instead.

This left a few possibilities that they would probably figure out when getting to the other side. It could be that the merchants decided to instantly abandon the place when the monsters began appearing above ground. All of them could have already been outside the city at a safe location and bringing down this wall was just a precaution to keep any potential threats from following them.

“Leave it to me.”

Roland replied while observing the dark corridor behind them. While going through this place there were some forks in the road so there was a chance of something appearing from behind as well. Luck was on their side though as after about fifteen minutes they were able to make a big enough hole for

people to squeeze through. With some help from Roland's earth magic, the makeshift opening was strengthened so it wouldn't collapse.

"Wait here, I'll be right back."

"Aye, be careful lass."

Dalrak moved to the side while Senna quickly jumped through the human-sized hole without much trouble. In such situations, it was up to the people with scouting type classes to search the area.

'We have been steadily going deeper underground, they must have really wanted to evade detection.'

While waiting Roland continued to think about the situation and if it was possible for them to get through this location without being attacked. The deeper a hiding place like this was created the harder it would be for the authorities to detect it. Then there was a whole other issue with bribes. The nobles and church members could have been on the thieves guild's payroll which would not be that surprising.

'Everything comes down to money in the end...'

"Aarr shit, ye scared me."

Senna's head popped out of the hole after a minute from her departure. While he could hear her approach thanks to his radar this wasn't the same for the pirate girls.

"Stop shoutin' Christie, ye'll wake the dead wit' that voice."

This time around it was the youngest of the three sisters that gave out quite the surprise screech.

"Ye, shut your mouth girly."

Grisalde wasn't amused as she inserted her little pinky into her ear that she took the shout with.

"Stop your yapping, we need to move, the coast is clear so hurry up."

"Yeah yeah, stop squeaking pipsqueak."

After Senna vanished through the opening it was time to test the size of the hole out. Grisalde moved in through first and was barely able to get her wide shoulders and muscular upper body through it.

"Hey, move your fat arse through faster."

Roland could hear the halfling berating the large woman as her lower body also got momentarily stuck in the hole. With some help from the group and a firm push, she was able to land on the other side with the axe going through afterward.

"Dalrak, go next or those two might kill themselves..."

"Aye!"

Fearing for Senna's health Roland gave the order for the friendly dwarf to go first. For some reason, he seemed to be able to talk to both parties without getting any animosity in return. After he was through the trio from the ship were next and were then closely followed by Orson with a stupid grin on his face. It was clear that he was enjoying the view that he soon followed after.

“...”

Roland was the last one to squeeze to the other side. Before turning around he made sure to place one of the large boulders in the hole to block it. It didn't seem that they were being followed so there was no reason to collapse the entrance once more. It was better to leave an escape route if some enemies came from the other side.

“Wayland.”

“Give me a moment.”

Without needing a clarification after Senna called out to him two orbs of light were produced from each of his palms. One of them he threw up into the air, to no surprise this black market had a high enough ceiling to accommodate the illuminating light. The other light source remained above his head to help him see the things closest to them.

“They really did leave but...”

“Yeah, they left in a hurry...”

With the help of the illumination spell, the whole area became bright. The first thing that he noticed was that this black market was a lot larger than the one back in Albrook. Along with the whole width, there were levels going below. They were standing on the top floor and when looking down they could see a large open space. Roland felt as if he was standing in a large mall and looking down at the last floor that even with his spell was hard to make out.

“These stands were abandoned, some of the items are still there.”

“A black merchant left thar loot behind?”

Isabela was surprised as everyone knew that black market merchants were penny pinchers by nature. They would rather get injured than give away their money or wares that they could later sell. Yet these stands were abandoned with some strange herbs, potions, and even knives riddling the floor.

“Yeah, those monsters were here... look at that.”

Senna pointed everyone towards the wall where they could see some strange singular claw marks. They would align with the sharp tentacle blades that the spine eaters were equipped with but that was not the problem.

“If those creatures are here... where are the bodies?”

“That's a good question Orson, you get five points.”

Orson frowned at the jab from Senna but only became more aware of the situation around them. Everyone was quick to pull out their weapons with the exception of two. One was the trickster and the other the armored man that was scanning the whole area for enemies.

“You can relax for now, even if there were monsters here they have left, I'd say that they'd probably went that way...”

“Ooh, Wayland gets fifty points!” “The hell? Why do I only get five points!”

“ ‘cos you are stupid.”

“Calm doon ye two, noo isn't th' time fur this.”

While Dalrak was de-escalating the fight between the two Roland just looked in the direction of a certain large pathway. It was the most damaged one of them all, a lot of those claw marks were on the ground and they continued to the inside. There were signs of them trying to collapse the entrance but also of something pushing through which someone like Dalrak would probably notice as well.

“Where does that lead to?”

“Call me cap'n or Isabela, don't be a stranger now!”

Isabela frowned slightly while replying in a coquettish manner to Roland's question. It didn't seem that the woman was taking the whole situation as seriously as he did. Yet to keep it friendly he decided to just go along with her

“Uh... Then Cap'n does that perhaps lead to the thieves guild?”

“It does, 'ave ye actually been here afore?”

“No, it was just an informed guess but I hope that's not the way that we have to go to reach the docks?”

“Aye, don't worry 't isn't the way, t' the pier be in the opposite direction, follow me!”

Roland wanted to give out a sigh of relief as things seemed to for once be in his favor. Even though there was an outbreak in this area the monsters followed the thieves and merchants toward their main guild. This implied that most of the abyssal creatures would have gone that way but it didn't exclude the possibility of them being in the other corridors.

“How the hell could those things ransack this whole place, what is that shitty thieves guild doing?”

Orson shouted out while looking around.

“This is strange, the guild shouldn't be this weak.”

Senna brought up a good point. Something like a thieves guild would be well protected with their guild master being a tier 3 class holder. Unless all of their enforcers were on some kind of secret mission it was hard to believe that the tier 2 creatures could just go through the bodyguards and leave no bodies behind. Their absorption powers were known to everyone here so it wasn't strange that there was nothing left behind in their wake. However, it wasn't that hard to defeat them for people below tier 3 to the point of nobodies being left behind.

“I agree, we should be careful these monsters might be getting some help.”

“Do you mean?”

“Yeah, that's a possibility.”

“What are you two talking about?”

“That's why you only get five points.”

“The hell?”

Senna and Roland exchanged nods while Orson’s face became even more confused.

“Don’t worry about it, let’s just get out of here, even though it's such a waste...”

Senna agreed with Roland that there had to be some kind of secondary abyssal cult presence besides the creatures here at play. There were a few possibilities like part of the thieves guild already being in their clutches or a strong cultist hiding away somewhere as well. Then there also could be some kind of hiding place even further below.

What the halfling was pouty about were all the black market items that were left behind. Even now she was shoving some of the expensive-looking wares into her spatial bag while going towards the tunnel leading to the docks. It wasn’t different for Roland as some of the strange potions that were here and there could prove beneficial in some way.

There was no time, if they rested for too long the things that left for the thieves guild could return here. It would probably take hours to get through all these collapsed stands. It wasn’t worth losing their lives over some money or this was at least what was on Roland’s mind. His new friends continued to look at the ground with more interest while picking up disregarded coins and items to check for their worth.

“Do we have to go? How about we just stay for ten more minutes I'm sure if we all contribute we can get a fine haul!”

“No.”

Roland replied to Isabela’s plea for booty, he already knew where the way towards the docks was and he would drag the ship captain there if he had to. The light orb that was illuminating the ceiling soon popped thereafter which made plundering the area a lot harder. Begrudgingly everyone returned to the previous formation and continued down the next long corridor that should lead them to safety.

‘I have a bad feeling about this place...’

Even though the claw marks vanished from view there was something bothering him. For some reason, he felt like something was watching them but whenever he glanced at his radar he could not detect any nearby enemies.

This didn’t help as he knew that the technology he was using wasn’t perfect there was always a chance that something could be affecting his radar or that they found themselves in an illusion again. For this reason, he was constantly activating his debugging skill to see if any runes would appear and his eyes were becoming strained.

“We be well-nigh thar, see I told ye that we could 'ave ...”

Some members already had noticed that they were slowly moving back up and on the right track. Isabela started shouting and pointing towards the next fork in the road that was supposed to be the last one. This was an indication of a gathering spot and all the tunnels here were probably all leading towards thief guild associated establishments like the pub they came from.

Click

“Huh?”

However, before they could jump in joy a strange sound appeared from behind. It was followed by a more clear sliding door noise akin to secret passages. Roland was in the backline along with Orson so they could see the wall going up before their eyes.

“...”

“Wait what are you...”

Before the door slid open Roland stomped with his foot on the ground. His right leg started glowing and this light was transferred to the ground. Orson was surprised by the quick reaction that produced a multitude of thick stone pillars. They all sprung in front of that secret passage that just showed up to shut it.

“Why are you spacing out? Run!”

After the spell was finished he turned towards his party and instantly bolted in their direction. If his radar was correct then they needed to flee and do it fast...

Chapter 230: Making a run for it.

“Go go go!”

“I’m going, holy fuck stop collapsing the corridors Wayland!”

The whole party of adventurers was running towards what was supposed to be the exit towards the pier. In the back was Roland who with each step was releasing a jolt of magical energy that continued to shoot out thick pillars of earth to block the path behind them.

“What did you see back there, Wayland?”

“Now is not the time, just keep running.”

Orson commented again while running a bit in front of the panicked Runesmith. No one from the party was able to see what came out of that hidden wall but they believed in their current party leader's intuition and started running.

‘I didn’t expect them to be able to fool my radar but it does make sense, how else would they be able to hide their cult down there?’

The reason that Roland was running was linked to his detection device. The moment half of that wall slid open many red dots started appearing on the indicator. Yet this was not the scary part, besides the red ones he could see a different color that indicated a person belonging to the races together with the red ones.

It was clear that an actual Abyssal Cult member was together with a bunch of strong monsters which would complicate things. The monsters were strong in their own right but they lacked intelligence. Their attacks were easy to read as they would just toss themselves at the first person they saw. They gained some intelligence as they evolved but their movements were still mostly basic and locked to their cardinal instincts.

Yet with the appearance of a tamer or a handler the creatures would become ferocious weapons. The flying worm that was ramming into the costly Solarian ship was an example of such a use. Its might could compete with state-of-the-art magical technology that only a powerful faction like the sun church could afford.

'Maybe if we are lucky whoever was controlling those monsters would let us be and focus on more important things?'

There was a small chance that whoever was behind those monsters would not see them as a large threat but it wouldn't be so. After the creatures entered the corridors they were now showing up on the radar. The cultists clearly had something to confuse his detection device along with the scouting classes. If they were able to keep themselves hidden from tier 3 thieves then his little runic radar would certainly not be able to pierce through the veil.

"Shit, the entrance be closed thar best be somethin'...Did those bastards break the openin' tool? How are we supposed t' open it now?"

Finally, they arrived at the end of the tunnel yet what awaited them was another wall. Isabela was the first one to notice the hole to the side where the opening mechanism would normally be. She had gone through this part and seen other thieves activating it but now there was nothing there to press.

"Grisalde..."

"I'm on it."

While looking behind himself to check on the pillars that were blocking the way Roland called out to Grisalde. The large woman didn't need a direct order as she grabbed her heavy axe with both of her hands. Her muscles started contracting forcing her physique to become even more chiseled than before.

The axe collided with the hard wall but instead of it going through it only produced some cracks. This was not just a simple wall, it was reinforced by the thieves guild to make it hard for anyone unwelcome to descend into their tunnels. Even though Grisalde was a high level gold rank adventurers she would not be able to get through there with only one swing.

"Let me halp ye witht dat lassie."

Dalrak decided to help out by bashing the wall with his tower shield to produce more cracks. Perhaps if they had a proper sledgehammer they would have been able to get it down in a shorter timeframe but without them, it would take a minute.

"Something is coming... I can hear their voices."

Senna could tell that a bunch of monsters were arriving from behind them. The rock pillars that Roland produced were hastily created and could only slow them down slightly. To Senna's surprise when the groans of the monsters got louder they were dampened by some kind of explosion.

This was another surprise that Roland had left for their pursuers. While one leg was used to raise earth up to block the path his other was leaving behind trap spells. They had a similar way of working to his mine scrolls but at a diminished rate. Their biggest drawback was that the mana would dissipate rapidly but for this encounter, they were the perfect mana mines.

“The explosions aren’t stopping them?”

Roland was actually surprised by the fact that their enemies were still continuing with their chase. He expected the tunnels to collapse on top of the monsters after they passed through them to block their approach. But when looking at the ceiling he understood that it wasn’t easy to make this place crumble. Whoever created this tunnel was a master at their craft, bringing down the ceiling would require a much bigger blast than the tier 2 explosive spell that he created while running away.

“Can you get through the door?”

“Fuck, I’m trying... some shit left a metal grate inside this damn rock...”

Now this was troublesome, he could see the rocky wall crumbling in various places but not going down. Even Grisalde who could probably generate more physical power than he could not break through it. Her weapon was the one that was becoming bent out of shape after colliding with the metallic reinforcement this wall was created around.

‘There is not time...’

“Everyone move away from the wall and cover your faces, I’ll break through it with a spell.”

While it might have been possible to bust through that wall by his party members there just wasn’t enough time. The explosive trap spells were being constantly set off but the red dots on his radar continued to push towards their location. It was clear that these creatures would arrive here shortly and they needed to get outside promptly.

When the other adventurers saw Roland take out a glistening gem to place it on his chest they knew what he was about to do. Without questioning him they all jumped to the sides to give enough room for the beam that was coming. This confused the three pirate-like women that needed to be pulled behind Darlak’s tower shield for safety.

Just like in the village his armor started glowing with the highest concentration being focused on the chest area. The runes had been repaired beforehand which would allow him to fire this beam of concentrated energy at the highest output.

‘I can’t use up all of my mana, the wall is already partially broken...’

This time around the situation was not as dire. He wasn’t against a tier 3 monster that could regenerate itself constantly. The only thing before him was a wall that was reinforced with what looked to be regular steel. Grisalde’s axe that wasn’t of the utmost quality was already able to bend it out of shape, what he needed to do now is aim at the weak spot and finish it.

“Shiver me timbers!”

After hearing Isabela’s surprised tone when producing a sentence that he only expected to hear in pirate movies the beam went off. It traveled at a rapid pace and quickly connected with the middle of the wall. The whole place was instantly lit up in red in the same color as the gem that he inserted. It took a few moments but the beam started to quickly melt through the wall before producing a loud bang.

Everyone covered themselves up to protect their faces from any shrapnel. On the other side of this wall, a large red dent started pushing out before forcing the wall to explode. Most of the produced debris was

tossed into the room that was outside while the people on the inside received minor cuts and slight burns due to the heat.

Not long after the explosion, the group burst through the created opening with Dalrak in the front with his shield raised. He was followed by an angry-looking barbarian and three coughing women that were swearing all over the place.

“Shit, fuck 'n shit.”

“Don’t stop, it’s not over yet.”

Right behind them, Senna appeared with Orson following and Roland being the last one. Arcs of blue light were still firing off his chest making it look like he was being electrocuted. Even after sacrificing a big chunk of mana that was giving him a headache he was able to keep focus thanks to his recent upgrade to his pain threshold.

‘Maybe I put a bit too much into it... luckily the runes haven’t been degraded...’

The way forward was now clear but this was not yet over. He felt tired but there was no time to rest, even with a bit of a migraine he injected more mana into his armor to increase his own agility. Even though he was all the way in the back this allowed him to quickly catch up to his party members.

Now the only thing to do was find the ship and get out of this city. His glorious plan of safely traversing through the thieves guild tunnels had been partially successful but it also put them all in a tough spot. If for some reason they couldn’t get to the ship or it had left then their only hope would be to contend with the monsters in the city. Leaving outside through a secret tunnel would be impossible now.

“What is this damn smell?”

Orson wanted to hold his nose as he burst through the door. What he saw inside was a lot of fish products that were giving off a strong smell. Everyone else was also glancing around with Isabela pointing with her sword in one direction.

“Stop lookin' around like idiots, the exit be this way.”

Where all of them came out was at a fishmonger’s abode. Various fish were here and were at various stages of being preserved. Some were in ice, while others were dried or preserved in salt. After the stress of running away, some of the people here started getting hungry but soon they awoke to the reality of the situation as a strange deep growl escaped from within the opening they blasted open.

When they looked in the direction the sound was coming from they saw their party leader’s glowing suit of armor. It was in the process of being enveloped by dark leathery tentacles very similar to the ones of the monsters they all saw in the small village.

Roland was in trouble, even though he activated his agility boost he had been caught by the pursuing monster. He didn’t turn around but when he was about to collapse the exit behind him a tendril shot out from within the darkness and coiled itself around his leg. Even though he was quick with his sword to slice it apart, more of them appeared in a flash.

“Wayland!”

The people from the group could see him struggling to free himself, before they could help him they were stunned by the strange scream of the monster holding on to him. The ball of tentacles and eyes finally revealed itself as it started pushing through the opening in the door.

“Shit, this thing looks like the one from the village...”

Roland didn't need to use his identification skill to confirm the monster's type. It was very similar to the one he previously faced but it wasn't quite the same. When comparing it to the one the woman from the golden order slew this one wasn't as fearsome. Even now he was somewhat able to resist the pull of these tentacles which would be impossible against the tier 3 being he faced before.

“It's fine!”

He called out while moving a hand that was not being coiled around. From his spatial satchel, he pulled out a certain vial with a sun symbol on it. After quickly popping the small cork with his thumb he placed it inside of his palm. There it was surrounded by magically produced water.

‘Common, open it up.’

Considering his situation a normal person would be shivering in fright. Yet thanks to some of his skills he was able to keep calm under all this pressure. The monstrosity with many eyes and a giant mouth was slowly wiggling out of the exit that was blasted open. Suddenly the moment he was waiting for occurred as it opened that toothy mouth to release another deep shout.

Without losing a beat he fired off the orb of water into that gaping mouth. The effect wasn't instantaneous but soon enough he could feel the grip on his limbs weakening to the point of him being able to get himself free.

“What did you do?”

“It doesn't matter, just run and leave it there, it's not the only one.”

Roland quickly shouted at the party members to make them aware of the problem at hand. They didn't need him to repeat himself as they all rushed behind Isabela that had already bolted up towards the only exit. While they were rushing up the wooden stairs to safety they could hear the strange painful groans of the monster that for some reason was unable to give chase after swallowing the orb of water.

The spell was a simple ‘Aqua ball’ that any water mage would be able to produce without much trouble. The vial that was inserted into it contained the holy elixir that Roland had bought earlier from the church. He had seen the effects of divine energy on the Abyssal parasites before it was natural for even the larger ones to have the same weakness. It was similar to a regular human being poisoned, the creature had swallowed this divine concoction that would burn it up from the inside.

“Took ye long enough, get on!”

When on the outside to the surprise of the whole party the ship captain had not run off on her own. Instead, she and her sisters were on top of a carriage with two horses pulling it. It was large enough for all eight of them to get on it with a few members like Roland taking up a spot on the outside.

This carriage had seats in the front for the coachman while also having a spot for a servant to sit in the back. Roland was the only person that was capable of using long-range spells so to make a getaway he decided to take it up. Senna remained on top while Isabela had the reins in her hands.

“Hey, a lot of those ships have left, are you sure we’ll make it?”

Orson asked while peeking his head out of the carriage. Inside were the other two sisters along with Dalrak. None of them were optimistic about getting out of here through the sea but Isabela was confident enough so they were willing to give it a shot.

“Fear not, me lads would ne'er leave without thar cap'n.”

After everyone was together the carriage took off towards the docks. There was a long straight road going down with not that many obstacles in the way besides a few tentacle-slinging spine eaters. The bigger problem was behind them, the moment they got the carriage in motion a loud explosion-like sound erupted behind them.

This was caused by the injured monster that burst forth after them. It was not alone as another similar-sized creature appeared right next to it. The one that Roland used his elixir on was in a bad state, its form was more gelatinous than usual as it was decomposing before them. Even though this one was not the problem, the plethora of other strange monsters behind it certainly was.

It was a truly horrific sight to behold. Some of the larger tentacle monsters pushed the smaller ones out of the way while madly rushing behind the moving carriage with people in it. The streets were deserted as most people had sought shelter closer to the church or the noble district. This caused all the creatures in the area to hyper-focus on the group of eight heading towards the pier where a ship was waiting for them.

Luckily for everyone they had a mobile turret in the form of Roland with them. With his magic runic rod still operational he readied himself to release some of the more damaging spells toward the pursuing monsters. Yet this wasn't all as from the sides more enemies approached, would the small group of people make it to the docks before every monster in the area got ahold of themselves, or would they fall before their final destination...