

Runesmith 247

Chapter 247: Foxy.

"You shall all bear witness when the great one descends, your flesh will be turned into his glorious body, the world will finally become whol..."

Thud

"Shut up, damn shitty cult nuts."

"Hey be careful, that's the last one, we need to get more information out of him."

"But boss, none of those fuckers talked, their heads even started to explode..."

In a room lit up by magical torches a peculiar scene was taking place. An old man in a dark robe with an insignia of the Abyssal god was cackling while in a pool of blood. To the side was a small pile of corpses of people wearing similar robes.

"This one seems to be different, boss. I think he is a high-priest, almost a tier 3... we lost many good men during the raid..."

A large man with an even larger scar across his face delivered a kick to the laughing high-priest. The man's hands and legs were bound, the foot connected with his stomach and caused his whole body to be flung against the dirty wall.

A sound of bones being broken was heard by the small group of people here yet no one seemed to mind. To them, this was quite the normal display, a day-to-day occurrence. In the underworld, a person needed to grow a tough outer shell. Without getting used to all the blood and violence it was impossible to survive here.

"Gah..."

"Please don't damage the subject, I still need him alive, the other ones weren't very... noteworthy."

A man in a tailored suit and glasses walked in. He had the appearance of a posh Buttler at around the age of forty. His hands were covered with black gloves but a tint of red was visible. To the side, he had a large bag that he placed on a nearby table. Soon he opened it up, in it, there were various vials with strange liquids, medical tools like scalpels, and syringes as well.

"Do you think you can get something out of this one, Doc?"

A woman's voice came from the side, all of the people in this room looked at this lady. It was a peculiar sight to see a woman of about the height of a hundred seventy centimeters be surrounded by brutish-looking men.

Her body was clad in black leather armor that quite tightly hugged her body and allowed everyone to see her curvature. The lower side of her face was covered by a mask that seemed to have a filtration feature. A hood was draped over her head which didn't allow people to make out her facial structures.

"I can't promise you anything, Guild Master. The magics that keep these fanatics in check are strong. The stronger with their delusion they become, the more adverse their reaction to the stimulus becomes"

The gentlemanly looking man looked towards the bunch of corpses that were all missing their heads. He had already gone through the henchmen but all of them had some kind of in-built defensive mechanism that would kill them instantly.

"You're telling me that the famous underground doctor can't do anything either? Do you expect me to still pay you?"

"I didn't say that it won't be possible."

The man continued to work with his back while talking to the leather-clad woman. From within he pulled out something that resembled a butcher's apron. He started placing it over his clothes and soon also took out a syringe containing a strange purple liquid.

"Give me a day, if he has some information, you shall have it."

"... Let's go boys, give the Doc some space, you all know he is shy."

The men inside the room looked towards the syringe and strange vials. They knew what was about to happen and would rather not be inside this room to see it. Even though they were thieves and killers, torturing required a stronger stomach. Soon the woman and three of her goons were walking through the dungeon-like corridor.

"Are we sure that it was the only hiding place?"

"Our guild members went through their hiding hole, they weren't there for long, a few months at most. They were slowly expanding the tunnels but weren't able to connect to anything worthwhile, think we got lucky this time."

The large man that previously kicked the high-priest against the wall talked while the others remained quiet. The day before they had managed to unearth the Abyssal Cult's hiding place, inside they found six people and the high priest.

"Even if some of them escaped, they won't be able to leave."

"We'll need to thank that girly for bringing those magical boxes over, it made things a lot easier."

"Aye, she has a lot of guts if she was able to snatch it from the city guards."

"I'm not sure about that..."

"Hoh? Do you think they just gave it to her? Could she be working with the noble? Want me to bring her over?"

The man's facial expression changed to one of anger. This was the thief guild and unless it was a direct order from the guild master it was forbidden to keep secrets like that. Normally if a trade like this occurred the thieves guild member would have to report it to the big boss.

“That hatchling? No, that’s not it, she hangs around that Runesmith a lot and he was the one that made them.”

“You sure know a lot boss...”

“That’s why I’m the boss, now screw off and make yourself useful.”

The large man didn’t know what the leader was thinking but he was not in a position to make any decisions. It seemed that the girly that brought over the magical boxes had some connections to powerful people on the outside.

“Aye, I’m going...”

Soon the group of four became three after the woman clad in leather vanished behind the corner. Even when the three men tried they could not hear any noise, it was as if she was never there, to begin with.

“The boss creeps me out, she always appears out of nowhere. Does anyone even know how she looks?”

“I heard that the last fellow had his eyes gouged out, so better be careful...”

“You two better shut up, if she hears you, your balls might be snipped.”

“I’d rather die than lose those.”

“Hah, you just use them on whores.”

“Is there any other use for them? Also, Buckley, the boys have been getting annoyed lately... it’s about that Runesmith...”

One of the men recalled something when the conversations switched towards the city Runesmith.

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“Shut your mouth, he is off-limits, if the boss says it then there must be a good reason for it. Don’t go out on your own and cause trouble.”

The two goons looked dejected. The Runesmith had been a good target to rob for years but they weren’t allowed to go near his house. There had to be some kind of deal in the background. There was always a list of people that the guild members weren’t allowed to touch. Most of the time this meant that they were paying a lot of money to stay safe.

The Runesmith was a peculiar case though as the other merchants wanted him out instead. Some of them even tried paying a bounty to get him out of the picture. Yet the guild master had strictly forbidden going against him, it was as if he was being protected by someone powerful on the outside.

The only way of robbing his workshop would be to quickly abandon the city and seek shelter under a different guild master. This was not something a normal thief would be willing to do. The guild masters didn’t need to listen to each other but that didn’t mean that they wouldn’t exchange favors. Sometimes the rule-breakers would be sent back in parts just to earn some good faith with a powerful tier 3 class holder. This also depended on the transgression, fights between lower-ranked members were mostly ignored by the higher-ups.

“Fine but after this is over, you’re buying me booze.”

“Hah, dream on.”

Soon the group of thieves guild members dispersed to continue searching for the Abyssal Cult signs. It looked like they were the ones with all the cards. Almost all of the cult members were infected besides the high-priest. Thanks to Roland’s devices they would be able to control the situation. Even if some escaped from the underground they now had checkpoints where everyone would be examined. Unless the cult created brand new tunnels they would not be able to infiltrate their underground base.

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A few minutes later a bookshelf started rattling while sinking back into the wall. It then slid to the side to reveal a large sturdy door. This door didn’t have a handle; instead, there were various magical symbols that started to light up. The door started to slowly open up to reveal the leather-clad woman that was referred to as boss by the guild members.

“These garments are so constricting...”

The mouth-mask was tossed to the side along with part of the upper garbs that were now coming off. When she was finished the leather armor made its way onto a wooden mannequin that was surrounded by various short-bladed weapons. Throwing knives, poisoned needles, and items that looked like bombs were neatly placed on the walls or encased in glass cabinets.

The secret lair of the thieves guild master was riddled with various traps and one of the few places where she could relax. There was even a bathing area that the woman decided to occupy after getting the foul stench of the unwashed thieves on her. For someone with an enhanced sense of smell, it was truly a painful experience.

“That I have to put up with this...”

The woman found herself submerged in a large tub made of the finest silver. Her head was sticking up to showcase a rather alluring visage. When looking further a set of large fox ears could be spotted and after her bath was over it was completed by a tail that would fit on the same animal. The woman’s face showed a frown as these extra appendages seemed to appear only after she removed the black clothes.

“At least something is finally happening.”

After the bath, the woman was quick to put on a rather revealing eastern-style kimono. Her long legs and thick thighs popped out and only the ample cleavage was more eye-catching. With the bushy tail and fox ears, she would be unrecognizable to the guild members and her body proportions were also altered.

“Madame Isis.”

“How are the guests?”

“Everything is in order.”

The woman was greeted by a lady wearing heavy makeup and quite the scandalous dress. When walking forward through the establishment she could hear various heart-filled moans of pleasure. She emerged

to a small balcony overlooking the well-lit district that was filled with drunks and people seeking the thrill of the night.

“Well done, keep up the good work...”

The woman blew out a large puff of smoke from the elongated pipe while looking out into the distance. The working girl that was with her smiled and returned to her work of enticing the red light district clients.

“Could this be a sign of change... perhaps this boredom is about to end...”

A grin appeared on her alluring face as she looked toward the star-filled sky. Soon she returned back to her establishment to play her role where no one was the wiser.

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“Hm... Is this really the best that I can do?”

Roland as always was working until late into the night. While people were having fun in the city he was stuck in this room lit with magical lights. At this point in time, he was looking at his armor set. A life-sized dummy was wearing it just so he could examine it from all sides. After returning home he had fully repaired everything and all dents were ironed out.

“What if I place this here...”

Recently he had questioned his choice of weaponry. The armor was good as a means of casting spells but he felt like it should be able to do more. It wasn't much different than tossing spell scrolls at people while encased in metal. Thus he was now trying to innovate a bit.

In his hand, he had one of the legs that belonged to his spider golem. It was one of the mass-produced designs that Bernir had assembled. While he would prefer to not use inferior parts together with his expensive armor, there wasn't that much time. If it was possible he needed to cut corners, if the new design worked then perhaps he could improve it later.

“Hm... they are too short... but it doesn't look that bad?”

After fiddling around for a moment he had attached two of the golem legs to the rear side of his armor. They were attached slightly below the neck and the shoulder part. With this, they were able to bend forward while also backward.

‘Should I place them on a rotary joint or will that complicate the mechanism?. I could just make the top part bend backward to cover the rear... would making them bigger be feasible... could they support my weight?’

At first, he just wanted to insert the legs as something similar to a movable turret. Yet soon after the part was attached his imagination started to take over. It seemed that the new trait that he had achieved was actually working. In his mind, he was already imagining large insect legs glued to the armor back that could actually help him scale walls.

‘Yeah... that's probably not going to work, at least not for now...’

Roland wanted nothing more than to design a futuristic runic suit of armor but he wasn't quite there. First, he would need to design a whole new backplate to support those spider-like legs. They would also need to be much thicker and able to take all that weight. Then came the problem of designing a whole new runic program to make them function. Even then the whole design could become a failure as only after doing some testing would he truly know if it was worthwhile.

"Best to stick to something more basic..."

After fiddling around he had decided to take the spider legs down from the back. To replace them he grabbed something different, it was smaller and had a tube at the top part. It was attached to something possessing several moving joints, with the tube part being on a circular joint. In short, it was a small turret that could move around independently while targeting enemies.

After some more fiddling around this miniature cannon was haphazardly placed on the armor's left shoulder. While touching the portable canon directly he could activate the inscribed runes to make it rise up. It looked like an assembly line robotic limb that could move around.

'Maybe I should make it fold back during close-ranged combat...'

He could see this mini turret firing off guiding spells at monsters that tried to attack him from the back or from a flank. Yet the robotic limb it was placed on was somewhat sticking out and an eyesore, it wouldn't be a problem for someone to hit it or for it to block his view. Perhaps for certain situations, it would be better for it to be hidden behind his back, it would also probably be a nice thing to surprise his enemies with.

The turret he was using was one of the many designs that he had already gone through while improving his house defenses. There were much larger ones at key locations on his walls. They were somewhat precise but would still have trouble hitting a rogue with a high agility stat. Yet they were designed to act more as a support feature to suppress any potential enemies.

"This might actually work and won't take much time to assemble."

The shoulder parts of his armor were heavy enough to not buckle under the weight of this small canon. After getting it in place and connecting them to the rest of the runic system he would just need to upload the separate program to control it. When it was integrated with his scanning system it would automatically pick up threats and fire if he so desired.

"Well then, it's almost time."

Roland looked towards the hidden tunnel that he and Bernir had worked on for years now. After all of his armaments were ready, the time to descend into the dungeon was upon him. With some luck he would be able to reach the tier 3 threshold sooner than most people would expect him to.

Chapter 248: Back in the dungeon.

"Have fun you two, but please be careful."

"I'm always careful."

"Aye, he's right, it's just his luck that is terrible."

After receiving a smooch on the cheek from Elodia, Roland was ready for the small one-man expedition. Next to him was his canine companion that was itching to sink his teeth into some salamander meat. Ever since getting back home, Agni had become restless. It was clear that he couldn't wait to have another adventure with his master, just the two of them as it usually was.

"Agni calm down! You're knocking down the tools..."

"He is just excited to go outside."

Elodia placed her hand on Agni's head which was now covered by a silvery metallic helmet. It covered quite a bit of his head with an empty spot for the large red gem sticking out at the forehead area. His forelegs were covered by plates of metal to protect him from attacks. For his torso and belly, he had a large chainmail jacket with more armored plating for the top parts.

Normally it would be problematic to place this much armor onto a beast that relied on agility. The added weight to the legs and body would normally cause Agni to be much slower and prone to getting hit. However, thanks to all the buffing spells that the wolf-barding had, he would be even stronger. These took a set amount of MP but were worth the increase in stats. Thanks to the mystical evolution variant, mana was not a problem.

"Wish we could do something about that tail... someone could lose an eye..."

The biggest problem with his wolf was the large tail that was moving like a propeller. Whenever the wolf got excited he would cause damage to anything that was behind him. If someone was smacked by that mass of organic rubies they would be in for some damage.

"Hey boss, that thing looks a bit off... are you sure that won't be a hindrance?"

While packing up Bernir pointed toward Roland's shoulder-mounted cannon. It was a testing product so he decided to stick with one for now. To balance it out he had to increase the weight on his right shoulder for the time being. For a blacksmith like Bernir the added contraption threw the whole design off, it just didn't look all that great and didn't quite fit the aesthetic.

"When I finish testing it, we can try designing something more eye-catching, if you want you can try drawing up some schematics."

"Schematics... hah, I'm not really good with those..."

"Well, there is always time to learn new skills."

Usually, Roland was the one that came up with the designs and put them on paper. Then Bernir along with Dyana would give their opinions if it needed altering. His two helpers used a more hands-on approach with not planning things out.

"Hm, perhaps I'll just make it before you come back Boss, I'd rather use my hammer."

"If you say so, just don't forget to finish your daily quota, we have been getting more requests lately, there have been a lot more new adventurers."

"No problem, you'll have a mountain of swords to inscribe runes on when you return!"

Roland smiled at Bernir who started flexing his muscles. He would not be gone for more than a week but that didn't mean that his assistants couldn't produce a bunch of weapons for him to work with. With their skills increasing and thanks to the runic power tools, the manufacturing process had gotten a lot faster.

"How is our new guard doing?"

"Ah, she is... trying..."

Before going towards the tunnel Roland turned his head towards Elodia. Grisalde his previous party member was on guard duty. Without her there he would not feel comfortable just leaving for a week again.

"Just tell her not to start fights with the customers, I know that she has a short fuse... and if something happens then."

"You don't need to worry boss, we'll be fine."

"That's right, have a safe trip and please be careful."

Both Elodia and Bernir quickly replied to stop him from talking. He had prepared some magical weapons for each one of them to use in the worst-case scenario. After hearing the same explanation multiple times, everyone was tired of hearing it.

"Is that so? Okay then, Agni let's go."

"AWOO!"

After hitting a few hammers from the wall stand Agni was ready for some adventure. The door shut behind the two as they entered the narrow corridor. There was not much space to maneuver which forced them to walk behind one another. It was made more difficult due to an overzealous wolf that decided to just bolt forward while leaving him behind.

"Agni..."

Roland could only sigh to himself while checking the third companion that was slowly stomping behind him. It was the same fat mule golem that he had most of his golems and utensils in.

"There he goes... I guess it's you and me big guy."

The golem did not reply as it just continued to lumber behind him. This golem was not alive, it was just a complicated program that responded to voice commands. Yet Roland knew that there was a possibility to make it more life-like. There were records of intelligent runic constructs in this world. If they were creatures with actual intelligence was still debatable, it could just be a very intricate program that had an answer for everything.

However, there was a possibility there. Some mages could summon creatures into this world that were able to communicate with them. Perhaps after reaching a high enough tier he could produce more intricate runes that could simulate a human brain or something close to it. If it was possible to create living organisms with the help of magic, then it should also be possible with runes.

'Doesn't seem like it's that far-fetched, I wonder how much more I'll be able to make after I figure out tier 3 rune stacking.'

This was something that he was looking forward to. For the time being, he was unable to recreate tier 3 runes even though his debugging skill still worked on them. He somewhat knew the theory behind the stacking but he could not perform this task without a higher-tier runesmithing skill. Yet considering that he was able to create tier 2 runes as a tier 1 runic blacksmith. Perhaps it would be possible to create tier 4 runes as a tier 3 class holder.

'With tier 4 runic magic there wouldn't be many people that could go against me... but I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't possible.'

The professor at the magical academy couldn't provide him with tier 4 runic knowledge. His knowledge ended at tier 3, without any help Roland would need to get a tier 4 rune to examine. Due to the high rarity, they had astronomical costs applied to them and the craftsmen capable of crafting them were considered geniuses. Apparently, the tier 4 structures were so complex that making one item could even take years.

"Awoof!"

His contemplations were ended by Agni's dog-like bark. They were at the end of the tunnel that still needed some work. The area was made a bit more spacious so that his mule golem along with Agni could stand to the side.

"This part needs some work..."

The tunnel ended with no exit, there were just magical lights pointing toward a somewhat unsuspecting-looking wall. When glancing onto his radar Roland could not see anything behind it but this was certainly the spot. To get past this point, some drilling would be needed. Without taking a break the golem was opened up and a large portable drill of immense size was taken out.

After pressing the large mining tool against the wall he started working. The large drill part sunk into the hard wall that would not be able to last for long. Together with earth magic that allowed him to move the softer dirt out of the way it didn't take long to get to the other side. The thickness of this wall was below that of a meter and not really a problem.

"This should do it..."

After creating a few other holes he filled them up with runic scrolls. Soon with the help of a small controlled explosion the path was opened up. Only after stepping through the human-sized opening did his radar register what was on the other side.

This was a hidden chamber on the second level of the Albrook Dungeon. Roland had mapped the entirety of it along with the hidden pathways that no one had discovered yet. The lack of runemages and runesmiths within the adventurer ranks was very convenient.

Just like the secret underground mining area and its walls, this one would reform itself after a while. Roland had considered placing a thick door between it to stop from it closing up. The dungeon was unable to absorb inorganic matter and he had already tested it by shoving a long tube through it.

After the wall was reformed the tube remained stuck in it throughout the entire length. The reason why he decided against it was for safety. The secret passages could always be discovered in the future. If he left a door here then the pathway towards his workshop would also be discovered.

He did not want to explain why he created the tunnel in the first place even though he had a reason besides the mining area. There was of course a way to place a door here while safeguarding his secret. Yet that would require placing traps to collapse the tunnel that he worked for years on, which he was unwilling to do.

The other option was to place the explosives inside of the dungeon. Considering that inorganic magical tools would not be eroded by the dungeon it was possible. The problem with that approach was that there was nothing holding people back from trying to enter into the hidden area again. In the end, he would still need to collapse the tunnel he worked on.

'Perhaps on the way back I can finalize the pathway, it won't be easy to get the thermal energy out.'

While thinking about the next venture he opened up an unsuspecting chest. It contained an iron dagger, something that he usually received from this low-level area. These chests were random drops and there was a small chance of getting something good like the egg Agni hatched from. Yet for now, he had not been able to get anything else on his level.

"Another one to my collection... I think this makes the 6th iron dagger with the exact same design."

After tossing the dagger into his mule golem he looked towards the opening. The eye sockets of his armor began glowing as he started up his aiming device. A spot above the entrance was locked on and his shoulder cannon began moving.

First, it raised itself from the folded position it was on. The small limb pointed upwards while adjusting its position on the lower circular joint. It took around a second for it to get into the right spot before firing a charged orb of mana. The blue projectile collided with the rocks causing a small cascade effect. Soon the entrance that he came through was hidden from view and even if someone came here they would not be able to spot his tunnel.

'Everything seems to be in order.'

Roland looked at the display screen that was showing him some basic figures about his new weapon. The output of how much mana it drained could be adjusted and he could shift to a different element for the spell it was designed for. There was no reason to add any special effects, a ball of concentrated energy that did a massive amount of damage was enough.

"Let's go Agni, I need to perform some tests."

With now being inside the dungeon he needed to get to the secret area. Regretfully it was impossible to make a tunnel that directly connected to the mining area. This was the most he could do as this chamber was the closest to his home. He would need a lot more time to burrow further down to connect to the huge underground lava zone.

The room he was in was connected to another hidden zone through which he could get to the sixth floor. From there he needed to take a few more shortcuts to reach the boss room. The boss was being constantly farmed by the adventurer guild which made getting through it an easy task.

“I really need to get those spatial runes working...”

“Awoo!”

While Agni was guarding the outside he was trying to squeeze the fat golem through the secret room's opening. He had to start carrying it when going down the stairs and some places continued to be a tight fit. Luckily with his radar system, it wasn't hard to evade snoopers that were littering the various pathways.

‘There are a lot more of them lately, good that I prepared already.’

The monsters on these ten levels were too weak to produce any worthwhile experience so he left it up to Agni to clear the path. It was a funny sight when a few newbies were spooked by that large Dire Wolf that was one shooting monsters they were having trouble with. To his surprise, while passing by he was also recognized by some of them. There weren't many people wearing runic armor that also had a wolf covered in rubies as a pet in town, so this was something that he would need to get used to.

From the sixth floor, he arrived at the seventh and made his way towards another special spot. It looked like a dead end but in reality, it was another shortcut that he could take. Instead of pressing a hidden button though he brought out the large hammer that he had recently created.

After making sure that there was no one close by he raised it up. The hammer head started glowing in a blue hue like most of the runic items that he made. With it being charged up he brought it down directly in front of the ground. One hit was all it took as a large chunk of rock exploded on the spot to create a hole.

Through this hole, he made his way towards the eighth level and quickly continued through another hidden path towards the boss chamber. With the whole ten levels mapped by his runic armor, he was able to find thin walls and ceilings through which it was possible to break through. What would normally take him a whole day only took one hour as he was already in the open lava zone.

‘Luckily most of the new adventurers are still only tier 1, this place hasn't changed that much, now only the most annoying part remains.’

As always he arrived late at night when most of the adventurers were going back to town. He had already rigged the entire lava lake area with mapping devices to detect anyone that could be watching. Yet perhaps in the future this would also not be a requirement as there was another entrance to the mining area that was usable just harder to access.

“Let's go Agni!”

“Woof!”

With the golem hosted above his head and an additional concealment spell cast, he made a run for it. With his current enhancements and increased stats, the trip to the center was quite short, within a matter of minutes both he and his wolf were in the safe underground location.

“Calm down Agni, I'll need you to stay in the back for a moment.”

“Wooo?”

Agni was confused as this was the part where he could always let loose. The monsters inside weren't anything that he couldn't handle and the path was usually cleared out by him. Roland had other plans though, the shoulder-mounted cannon needed to go through some live testing. The monsters on the inside were perfect to test against moving targets.

Magma Troglodyte

L65

"Perfect."

The first monster appeared, it was a volcanic variant of the Troglodyte reptilian monster that could be encountered in the higher levels. They were slightly larger than their unevolved counterparts and could also spit magma. Yet when faced with the shoulder cannon they weren't able to put on much of a struggle.

Within a moment the portable shoulder turret took aim toward the monster's head. The blue orb caused the tunnel to be illuminated long enough for the monster to look at the shining light. Its head instantly exploded causing chunks of flesh to splatter all over the walls and floor. Roland's current level and stats enhanced the cannon's power, a difference of more than fifty levels was impossible to resist.

Perhaps he overestimated the agility of the monsters here but almost all of them went down with one shot. Even with a grazing wound the monsters would become sluggish and succumb to the next blast.

'Good... it won't have trouble with enemies like this but probably won't do that much against something at my level, but I should test it further...'

"Agni, you can go ahead now, let's go visit our dear friend."

Agni's tail started moving as a propeller as he was finally allowed to toss himself into battle. Roland would support him from the back to make their journey faster and if everything went well, it would be time to face the boss in single combat.