

## Runesmith 249

### Chapter 249: Easy one on one.

“That takes care of the chamber guards.”

Roland relaxed while looking at the victorious Agni that was standing over two monsters that looked like crabs covered in volcanic armor. The ruby wolf wasn't much behind when it came to fire resistance and with the added armor, the volcanic decapod had no chance.

The creatures in this part of the dungeon were randomly chosen and these were not the best of guardians in a tighter corridor. The most dangerous part about them was the high-pressure projectile spit. But thanks to his magical shields he didn't even need to worry about dodging.

“You'll have to sit this one out Agni.”

“Awoo?”

It was time to face the boss, this time around Roland decided to try a more direct tactic. Usually, his tactic involved using his golems to seal the big dinosaur's movement before he delivered a devastating blow. It was a safe way to go about things as the monster had a few patterns that could be seen through.

Yet his level had progressed past this monster's. He had achieved his second tier 2 class and was already hundred thirty. The Bladed Volcanic Xornotaurus which was behind the door would usually spawn at a slightly lower level than that. Even though boss monsters were considered stronger than adventurers at the same level, this wasn't always the case.

“Let's go Agni, just stay in the back and don't engage the monster unless I tell you to.”

Even though he intended to have a proper one-on-one battle with the monster he wasn't stupid. Something always could go wrong so he needed to have a backup plan. Thus he opened up the mule golem and let six of his spider drones outside. After opening the boss chamber he ordered them to surround the area and stay at the edges.

### Bladed Volcanic Xornotaurus L 125

There it was, not long after everyone got in place the large monster descended from the ceiling. Even now this boss looked ferocious, the size difference was tremendous. It was somewhat strange but he didn't feel that he was in any danger. Even though normally that mouth should be enough to devour him in one bite, the monster felt below him.

Previously when facing this monster he felt a strange pressure weighing him down. It was his survival instinct kicking in and trying to force him to flee. Yet this time around there was none, it was as if he was up against a regular dungeon monster.

To the side was his enlarged kite shield that he had rammed into the ground. For the time being he decided to hold his large hammer with both his hands. Right as the monster descended to the ground he initiated a spell effect.

The head of the hammer began releasing a blue glow that enhanced the runes. It started with a pale light that continued to darken. Soon enough a chilling energy wave escaped from the focal point at the tip. This energy looked like a simple cone of cold but it had gone through several enhancements.

Just as usually the Xornotaurus variant had been caught off guard the moment it descended down. The chilling spell started to quickly drop the temperature around its body. This as per usual caused the monster to go into its enraged state. While in it, it was able to produce a high amount of heat to counter the cold.

“Hm... it doesn't look like it can oppose the cold spell fully.”

Due to Roland's stats, the Xornotaurus was faltering. The magic that not only intended to freeze the monster was also damaging it. Sharp ice crystals along with torrents of wind were slowly chipping away at the fuming dinosaur's body. In the past when he faced it, his spells were not able to counter the volcanic flames but now the monster was faltering.

“Is it due to the difference in stat multipliers?”

It seemed that he wouldn't even have to do much to win this fight. Just using his hammer to freeze the Xornotaurus was working well enough. The monster was trying to gain some momentum by running towards him but before it reached his location it would be frozen or severely weakened.

Yet before he could cheer for his victory the monster's back spikes began to glow red. They quickly dislodged themselves and traveled upwards. This gave Roland enough time to grab the shield that he placed down on the ground. The hammer's handle gave out a metallic noise as it shortened itself.

The spike missiles that the monster gave out were all focused on his location while ignoring anything else. It was clear that the monster realized that its main enemy was the armored man. Usually, it would use this attack as a way of suppressing a larger number of enemies but it apparently could also aim it at one.

However, even though the missiles rained down onto his location they only collided with a large shield of ice energy. A few large explosions caused the whole area to shake and even some of the rocks on the ceiling began falling down.

“Awwoo!”

“I'm fine, just stay there Agni.”

Agni called out to his master as he got ready to jump on the Xornotaurus' neck. Yet after hearing Roland's voice he quickly backed away. He was fine, the shield and his stats were enough to only take minor damage from this attack. Something that could have previously killed him instantly was now a minor inconvenience.

“Not bad... what will you do now... rushing in?”

The monster was usually quite smart but even it would lose itself to rage. After seeing that its attack didn't work it decided to rush forward. Its body was engulfed in even more flames than before. Each step it took caused the ground to shake and also left a searing claw print behind.

‘Is it banking on those flames resisting the frost spells during the charge?’

It wasn't a bad tactic, even Roland's ice spells would take some time to take effect. A high enough temperature could be enough to keep them in check. The monster hoped to devour him at close range with its advantage in strength.

Roland decided to take the monster up on its offer but before it got here, he swung his now one-handed hammer in an arc. This produced a blade of cold energy that flew forward. The Xornotaurus didn't dodge it and allowed it to collide with one of its legs. The timing was just right to throw it off balance. Coupled with a stomp that produced a small rock obstacle, the tactic was complete.

The Xornotaurus was charging forward with its toothy mouth opened wide. Its intent was to chomp down on the iron human as fast as it could. Yet this fast pace was a double-edged sword, by forcing it off balance it wasn't that hard to dodge the chomp. Almost instantly the hammer was used to smack the large jaw that missed the mark.

A loud sound of the monster's head being hit echoed through the whole cave. Its head jolted back as it was smacked away, its maddened charge only adding to the devastating effect of this hit. With Roland's current strength and addition of buffing effects, the damage was real. Sharp teeth that riddled the creature's mouth along with magma flew in all directions

It was still too soon to celebrate his victory, while the hit caused a lot of damage the monster was not dead. Instead of falling to the ground, the monster dinosaur caught itself with the help of its powerful legs. Quickly it shifted its weight to use its last trump card, the huge tail that had the shape of a sword.

Roland defended himself yet even after putting up a strong barrier he could feel it. The monster might have been below him in stats but it was still several times heavier. With the added weight behind the attack and momentum, it was several times stronger.

He could feel the swordtail smashing through the barrier spells and finally connecting with his shield that was blown to the side. His left hand felt like it was close to falling off but he somehow managed not to be flung away.

Even though the Xornotaurus' mouth had fewer teeth it didn't stop it from charging once more. After doing a spin around it glared at the enemy that caused it so much pain. To its surprise, the armored man just stared back. This enraged it, a massive shout of intimidation was followed by a buildup of fire energy in its mouth. The monster was intent on burning this troublesome enemy to ashes.

Roland on the other hand didn't budge and remained silent. His shield was blown to the side so he could not use it to defend himself. Instead, the cannon on his shoulder took aim, as the monster opened that maw a concentrated bolt of energy interrupted it. The monstrous dinosaur had a special organ that was responsible for producing those flames. This was something he knew and this same organ was the one that was now damaged by the blue sphere of mana.

The Xornotaurus throat was on fire, it could not control the flames anymore and blood was spilling everywhere. Its whole body began producing chaotic flames and magma that dribbled down to the ground. The ear-piercing screams of pain didn't bring Roland any joy so it was time to end it. While holding his battle hammer with both his hands and turning it around he delivered the finishing blow.

On the other side was a large spike that after connecting with the creature's head injected electricity into its body. If the spike wasn't enough to kill it then the electrical discharge would at least be able to stun it. However, not soon after he received the message of a successful defeat, the monster was dead.

"Hm... that could have gone better..."

Roland grabbed his left shoulder as his whole arm was stiff. Without his stat multiplier and level of spells, his whole body would have probably been sent flying into the wall. Even he was prone to overestimating his own capabilities and should have decided to evade it. Yet this was also a good reference point for future battles, even if the monster seemed weaker he could not underestimate it.

"Woof!"

"I'm fine Agni."

The spider drones that were on the side were called back towards the mule golem and started going back into the storage space. Agni, on the other hand, attempted to lick Roland's hand but the metallic taste of his gauntlets wasn't up to his standards. Instead, he focused on the dead monster's body that was ripe for the taking.

"No, you can't have the mana stone Agni."

"..."

Agni's tail, which was wiggling around like a propeller, instantly dropped down after he heard that statement. Roland on the other hand just rolled his eyes as he already knew what this dire wolf was up to.

"You ate all the mana stones from the other monsters, stop being such a glutton."

"Woof, woof!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm a cheapskate, what else is new?"

Roland felt as if he knew what his wolf was trying to tell him by how much he was barking. Though he wasn't against feeding him these boss monster mana stones in the future. It could have unlocked a prestige evolutionary option if he gorged down on something like this.

'I wonder if he ate tier 3 mana stones if he could get something really useful?'

There was always a possibility of rare skills and evolutions being gained instantly or later. Yet materials from tier 3 monsters weren't cheap, he would quickly burn through all of his reserves if he started buying them up. The more reasonable spot to get tier 3 monster parts was in the place that he was going to.

The test was over and Roland confirmed where he stood power-wise. This Xornotaurus would normally require a party of at least three people of the same level to defeat it. His prestige class and the armor he was wearing really did put him in a different category. If he was able to prepare more golems then he would be a force to be reckoned with.

This didn't mean that he would always be victorious. Just as the Xornotaurus almost blew him away with the swordtail, so could someone with a strong enough skill. He did not have much experience when facing high-level tier 2 class holders yet. If someone had the same stat multiplier of two, then he would probably need to keep his distance.

Some of the monster parts could still be used and worth the hassle. After getting all the components that could be used for crafting or trading he finally headed for the real training spot. The walk there was uneventful with a lack of any monsters and only a few traps that could be easily disabled.

"Just a few salamanders and slugs as always, go get them Agni."

After checking his map Roland opened up the secret exit from this mine area. Inside he discovered a few low-level tier 2 monsters. Agni was more than enough to take care of them without him interfering but the spider drones also gave some ranged support. After the quick encounter was over, the golems were sent off to find the rarest materials.

Besides the six usual mining drones, he had another two accompany him towards another location. Agni and the mule golem weren't far behind either while the other six golems were left in the mining area to their work.

"This brings back memories..."

Roland remembered this corridor well and the time he was with his older brother and Lucille. They had arrived in the secret mining area after falling down. His aim was to check what was at the end. After a few encounters with ceiling slugs, he arrived at the large chasm.

"So that didn't work."

The previous time he was here he decided to cave in the tunnel. This was the second entrance to the secret area that he didn't want anyone to discover. He had tested if perhaps the dungeon wouldn't recreate the opening but it did. This area had been caved in the last time he was here but now it was as if there was never any rubble at all.

"Plan B it is."

For this exact reason, he decided to prepare something different. While he took out a brownish-looking heavy cloth from the carry golem the spider ones began going outside. There in some places, they began drilling small holes that would be used to support the camouflage.

While they were working Roland looked at the steep wall and the lack of flooring below. Even when he was already down here he could not see anything at the bottom. How far this chasm went down was anyone's guess. This place was quite dangerous as the last time he was here it was riddled with holes from worm-type monsters.

It had been discovered that these creatures would be activated when a larger concentration of people tried crossing the mountain. The expedition with nobles was the first time this effect was triggered and could be only confirmed later.

Some people had apparently tried descending down to the lower area but it was deemed too dangerous. Thus for the time being Roland decided to cover up the hole. As long as the material was inorganic it would not be consumed by the dungeon.

“As long as someone doesn’t get too close to it, they shouldn’t notice...”

There was no wind coming out of this underground area so he didn’t have to worry about the heavy cloth being blown away from the inside. There was always an option to place runic traps like mines in the tunnel to save his secret. Yet this could potentially cause harm or even kill the person that would travel through. This was not something that he was willing to have on his conscience.

“Let’s go back Agni.”

“Woof.”

Finally, he returned to the main area where his spider drones continued to work. Just as he had instructed, a few had brought over some Elokin’s crystals. With them, he could go ahead with the next stage of his plan that would increase his grinding rate. From inside the mule golem, he started taking out various metallic objects. These were part of a larger construct that he was going to assemble.

“These crystals should be enough to power everything, let me get to work...”

After looking at the pre-prepared parts that consisted of screws and bolts he remembered the old times of furniture assembly. This would be a bit more difficult but wouldn’t take that much longer.

### **Chapter 250: Skeletal friends.**

“That's about it...”

Roland screwed in the last screw to the device he was assembling while Agni gave out a yawn. After clearing out the last of the monsters there wasn’t really much to do for him anymore. Even if they spent a week here the monsters wouldn’t respawn that fast. Thus the only thing he had to do was to sniff at the strange thing that was standing there.

“Be careful with that Agni.”

“Awoo?”

Agni moved his head sideways while looking at his owner. The thing that was standing here was on something that looked like an adjustable platform. At the rear side, there were two long support limbs that would keep it from sliding back. In the front, there was a really long cylindrical shape that made this object look like a massive gun.

This thing had the shape of a cannon but it lacked a hollowed-out bore. There was no inside chamber to house anything resembling a cannonball or bullets. There also weren’t any fuses to be lit but instead, it was connected to a side canister by thick cords. This canister was the actual fuel portion of this magical device that Roland was slowly filling up with the crystalized Elokin’s fluid.

The cannon had handles that he could hold with both his hands as well as a sight for aiming. It was a fully functional magical cannon that could cause a lot of damage but had a very limited aiming angle. It was made as a tool for farming monsters and used the naturally forming crystals here as fuel.

Roland had thought about ways of hastening his leveling process. It was possible to use his current armor to produce a strong enough blast to kill some of the lower-levelled tier 3 skeletons. It was a very inefficient way of going around it and also a fast way of damaging his expensive creation. Instead, he decided to create a bulky magical cannon from cheap materials. The thickness of it would counter the deterioration effect and he could just repair the runes by himself.

With the cannon now assembled all that was left was to open up the wall. After going through this part several times he was convinced that the monsters inside would not attack him. Even if they did they could not penetrate to the side of the dungeon he was residing in. Thus he could go ahead and create a large enough opening for the cannon to shoot through.

“It doesn’t seem to be getting thinner at least...”

Each time he visited this space he had made measurements. The area between the two dungeons didn’t seem to have moved at all. At first, he was concerned about the opening spilling into this dungeon but after further investigation, this didn’t seem possible. The dungeons had separate areas of effect, something was keeping the creatures from being able to leave them.

‘Could these dungeons really be some type of living organism made from magic?’

This was not the first time two separate dungeons came across each other. The main theory was that the creatures that came from one dungeon could not survive without the support of their dungeon’s mana. They would even be separated into levels by their dungeon as well.

‘Perhaps they require a certain mana signature to survive? That would explain why they can’t go out or even go to separate levels.’

This was only a theory that was somewhat faulty. If a higher level collapsed with a monster falling to a lower one they wouldn’t just die. He had even tested this out on one occasion while trying to find a shortcut to the lower levels.

‘What makes more sense is that the dungeon blocks its monsters from leaving in certain areas like passages between levels. There is probably some kind of barrier right before its region of effect ends as well.’

Yet that was only when the same dungeon was considered. It didn’t look like the monsters could break through this invisible barrier and travel into another dungeon at all. He couldn’t find any research on anything like this happening and his contact at the magical academy didn’t have any information on it either. It seemed that this was a very safe way of grinding and he was in no danger at all.

‘Even if a monster breaks through, it should not be able to survive in this environment, the mana in this area should be like poison to it or at least its reserves should run out and it would just die.’

After putting his worries to rest he moved the cannon closer. For the time being the opening to his grind spot was devoid of any monsters. He took this time to heft his weapon closer and aim it towards the middle. Luckily the dead-end corridor on the other side wasn’t very wide so his targets would not have that much space to dodge.

“Agni, whatever you do, don’t get close to that hole, just stay there for now.”

Roland pointed to the opening that he made. Agni was very interested in what was in there and would be able to venture forward. He would not be able to contend with the tier 3 undead monsters in there. It was a possibility that he would try intercepting one of them if they attempted to charge towards his cannon. He knew that they would be bounced back by the invisible barrier but Agni didn't.

"Woof?"

"Yeah just stay there and look at what the golem for now..."

### **Infernal Skeleton Berserker**

#### **L 159**

Finally after about ten minutes of waiting his first enemy appeared. It wasn't a Skeleton Champion that usually showed up. Instead of the rattling knight, he saw something that was a head taller and much bulkier. Its bones were a lot thicker and it looked more like a gorilla than a human being.

'So that's how Armand looks under all those muscles?'

A little smile covered his face as he moved the monster into the cannon's sight. He had a clean shot as the monster was just standing there and minding its own business. While holding onto this contraption he could integrate it into his own targeting system. Thanks to this he knew when to finally pull the trigger.

This weapon required quite a bit of time to charge. The canisters with the mana crystals started glowing as mana was transferred towards the runic structure. Various bright runes started appearing on the cannon's shaft that continued to become brighter and brighter. At the end of it, a large ball of blue energy was forming, and with each passing second, it continued to grow until it reached the size of a football.

Finally, it was ready, a tiny jolt of his own mana was the only thing required to make this cannon roar. Agni that was on the side jumped up in fright as the beam of condensed mana drilled its way towards the Infernal Skeleton Berserker. It collided with the top part of its body and started spiraling out of control.

The monster was caught off guard, its bones started shattering after a moment as the beam of blue light exploded in the corridor. Roland was forced to brace himself for impact, even with the two large support limbs he needed to hold the cannon with his own two hands. If he did not the beam would push him back and probably burrow its way into the ceiling from how much firepower it possessed.

**Infernal Skeleton Berserker has been slain.**

**Congratulations you have leveled up!**

The moment he noticed the system prompt he instantly cut the mana injection. The roaring beam of light slowly dispersed into the environment. Tiny sprites of mana that looked like tiny dots traced a path towards the hole in the wall that had been made slightly wider. The whole metallic frame was still flashing with glowing runes that continued to give out smoke.

"One shot, one kill huh? Not bad."



After the smoke had cleared he glanced towards the opening to the other dungeon. There was not much left of the monster that he had defeated. Most of its upper body was blown away while the legs were pulled back into the wall behind it. The more astonishing part was that the walls behind his target didn't seem to have taken that much damage.

The mana drill spell was created to achieve a lot of penetrative force by using drill-like movement. It didn't drain that much mana and for this reason, could be overcharged to produce a very powerful hitting spell. Even then for some reason, it was not really able to produce much damage to the wall that was behind the monster. He could only see a small gash appearing there.

'So that material is stronger than a tier 3 monster's body? Would it be possible to get those stones over here?'

After noticing the resistance of those walls he wanted to bring them home. If he could create walls made of those materials then he wouldn't need to worry about most intruders. The spell he created was able to one-shot a tier 3 monster but it was only able to produce a small scratch on the stone wall. There were some of those stone slabs on the ground along with some thinner tiles, the problem was getting them over to his side.

'Should I send the golems in?'

After thinking it through, he decided to give up on getting those materials for now. There weren't that many of them laying around there and if a monster appeared his golems would be instantly destroyed. Going in himself was out of the question for now as he wasn't really sure about traps or hidden enemies.

It was also possible for some kind of monster with camouflaging capabilities to be in that area. Even the Lich he previously saw might have been able to use spells to hide. If he just entered as he was now, death was quite probable. This didn't mean that he wouldn't attempt to get monster drops that were close by.

"That one is close by... it might be useful for something..."

There were a few spells that he could use for this matter. Close by he spotted some bones that seemed to belong to the creature's forearm. With the help of a mage hand spell, he was able to 'float' his net over to the desired spot and quickly pull on it to get the parts. This allowed him to get this monster drop any perhaps more future loot if he was lucky.

"No, you can't eat this Agni and I'm not sure you'd be even able to chew through a tier 3 bone..."

Agni was very interested in the skeletal hand. When Roland compared it to his own, the monster's digits were almost twice his length. There were sharp claws at the end that seemed like short knives instead.

"These wouldn't need that much work... the bone could be sharpened into a blade..."

Only one of the forearm bones made it towards his side with only three fingers. It was quite thick and would probably be able to be made into a blade of a dagger. Roland knew that these sorts of weapons were quite popular with the rogue types. They were very light while still retaining a lot of sharpness.

"This thing should be able to sustain runes too... maybe I should start gathering those bones..."

While the bones would lose some of their durability after the monster's death, they were still around the upper tier 2 level by themselves. There was no reason other than safety for not gathering these. If he managed to get the skulls he could even create masks or helmets that would go for a bit of coin. Making bone armor wasn't a problem either and the light weight would make it quite popular.

'Wish the mage hand didn't have such a short range...'

Roland gave out a sigh while looking at all the large bones that were blown back to the end of the room. Perhaps he needed to come up with some kind of suction spell that would suck the spoils of war toward his direction. Yet he would rather repel all monsters from this opening as he still wasn't one hundred percent sure that they would be able to come for him.

During his wait, he also needed to produce a chilling effect on the cannon. It tended to overheat quite fast and it was almost impossible to produce more than one shot at a time. After the beam killed the monster he needed to at least wait for two minutes before the second attempt. This cannon was powerful but its use as a weapon was very limited.

However, for the purpose of one-shooting tier 3 monsters in this closed location, it was the perfect tool. There weren't that many monsters wandering into that small corridor that he was limited to so there was enough time for the weapon to cool itself down. It took another twenty minutes for another skeleton to appear, this one was wearing armor which would make piercing it a bit more problematic.

"Is it Resistium again? At least it's not so good against magical attacks..."

The torrent of magical energy erupted again and connected with the unsuspecting Infernal Skeleton. Even though it tried to react after the beam traveled through the barrier between dungeons, it wasn't fast enough. The spiraling beam collided with its upper chest area and head before another explosion quaked through the entire area.

**Infernal Skeleton Spearmaster has been slain.**

**Congratulations you have leveled up!**

**Congratulations you have gained a new title!**

'This feels too easy...'

Roland didn't know how he should react, within an hour he had leveled up twice. This speed was staggering as he was taking care of boss-level monsters that no one would normally be able to take out themselves.

**Infernal Skeleton Menace**

**Title**

**A title given to people that have managed to slay the infernal skeleton monsters. Gives the title holder a 1% damage buff whenever facing this type of monster.**

'The title appeared a lot faster than usual, do you gain them faster if the monsters out-level you?'

He wasn't complaining as the title would make things easier, a flat damage buff was always appreciated. Thus the grind continued and hours turned to days and soon close to a week had passed since he had gotten here. The cannon that he had constructed had deteriorated to a sorry state and some of its parts were heavily melted down.

'I should go back but this has been a giant step in the right direction...'

This was truly something to be happy about. When Roland glanced at his status and the whole ten levels that he gained he was ecstatic. Normally a person that was at his level would need many months and lots of hard work to catch up to this pace. It wouldn't be unfeasible if he managed to get to his tier 3 class within this year and finally be part of the upper echelon.

"I shouldn't get ahead of myself... but this method can still be improved, let's go back home Agni."

"Awooo!"

The hole in the wall was loosely covered up before he left. It took a while to disassemble the cannon and packing it up was quite the hassle. After the first three levels, the leveling process became slower and he started to reacquire multiple kills. The intervals between the monster encounter was also quite sluggish so he wasn't able to kill more than a handful each day. There weren't that many of them but still, he was gaining levels fast, this was truly a way to quickly power up.

...

But while the runesmith was making his way towards the exit another scene was playing out not so far away. As if it was waiting for the right moment to emerge a creature made itself known. A boney visage peeked out from behind the corner, it glanced at a spot in the wall that it could not see through.

It slowly traced those flaming eye sockets down to the ground. There it could see parts of its skeletal brethren. It used the large dark staff to poke the bones that were slowly deteriorating. It could sense that the dungeon was reabsorbing these parts back to itself to recover what it had lost.

Finally, it walked towards the small dead end of the corridor where many of its comrades had fallen. There was no enemy, nothing was there besides the empty wall at the end. Even then it raised its staff to produce a green skull made from flames.

The flaming skull made from emerald flames gave out a screech before it flew towards the unsuspecting wall. The collision of condensed magical power caused the whole place to shake and rubble to come down from the ceiling. The whole area was bathed in green flames along with the monster that produced them.

Yet the wall remained there, the skeleton moved closer as if it didn't want to believe it. The staff that it was holding was used as a regular club as it started repeatedly smacking the wall with no end. Tried it did, but it could not cause any lasting damage to this wall, it was as if it was something forbidden, something that it was not allowed to get through.

Finally, after several minutes it decided to touch the spot that it was attacking. To the creature's surprise, its bony digits were repelled by something. It was a strange feeling that lacked pain but only caused more indignation to arise in its decrepit soul. The flaming eyes that filled its skeletal eye sockets increased in size the more it continued to try.

Yet without seeing any progress even this creature decided to give up. There was something that it was missing. Perhaps if it observed the strange phenomenon more it could decipher its secrets, break it down and then understand it. Thus it returned back to the original spot it was guarding, when the strange mana appeared again it would be there to study it...