

Runesmith 255

Chapter 255: Toxic work environment.

"You're back?"

"Yes my Lord."

"Is something the matter? Does anything require our attention?"

"I'm not sure, the state of the city has been improving lately, it's mostly thanks to Lord Arthur's managing capabilities."

"Hah, well glad that all that studying paid off, they never let me do much besides read boring books, think they wanted to sell me off as a pawn to that rich merchant family remember? Luckily the girl never did fancy me too much."

"You mean the one that you tripped and 'accidentally' spilled tea on her very expensive gown?"

"Or was that the one you 'accidentally' bumped into in the restroom? Hm, think that was Lady Alice perhaps it was..."

"It was the first one, stop making me out to be some kind of villain, Mary. I still remember that baffled look on her face, she really could never take a joke."

Arthur started chuckling to himself while placing a stamp of approval on one of the papers. There was a large stack of these right on his desk. Behind him, he could hear the auctioneer shouting out prices which made things slightly more annoying. But he had grown accustomed to the workload due to a particular person outshining him when it came to work ethic.

"Anyway, what's the thing that is bothering you, Mary? Have you found someone to take care of these that we can trust?"

"Not yet my Lord, perhaps getting rid of so many officials was not such a great idea."

"Perhaps... but at least now I can sleep at night knowing that they won't embezzle anymore money from this tiny budget."

"Then what is it?"

"It concerns the Runesmith, I'm not sure we can trust him."

"Wayland? Is there a problem? Is he part of the cult or something?"

Arthur got up from his chair and turned away from Mary. Instead of looking at her, it was the magical mirror instead. Through it, he could see a golemic product being sold that came from his recent associate. The money he was gaining by selling these high-quality products was quite high and even people from outside the city were starting to pay attention.

If things continued like this then perhaps more magically inclined types would start showing up. The city lord knew that true power came from magic and things related to them. A person could take a regular-

looking sword and place an enchantment on it. The difference in power and prestige such a weapon brought with it was significant.

“Nothing like that Lord Arthur, it’s just...”

“Is it just one of your hunches?”

“I’m not sure, not much time has passed since we came here but that man remains a mystery. Remember when he visited the other day to deliver that golem?”

“Sure, you informed me about it, was there a problem?”

“His levels, I think, are increasing at a much faster rate than normal.”

“They are?”

Arthur started rubbing his chin while looking at the auctioneer finalizing the purchase of the spider-like golem. It sold for quite the penny and the cut that he was getting would already pay for a large chunk of their expenses.

Mary was someone that he trusted, she had stuck with him through thick and thin. He knew that Wayland was wearing some type of magical device that scrambled any identification attempts. Yet his maid had some specialized skills leaning towards threat detection.

“Yes, when we first arrived here he was around my level but now...”

“It could be possible that he has a skill or magical item that can even fool your instincts. He might also be much older than we think and he never showed that much respect to nobility in the first place...”

Arthur was unsure what to make of the runesmith that was supposed to be working for him. The man was supposed to be around his age range but he had achieved much more than him already. That compound he was running also was steadily beginning to look more like a fortress. It was clear that he was hiding something and was even involved with the underground.

“Hm, he has helped us in many ways since we arrived here so I would like to give our new friend the benefit of the doubt... at least for now we need him.”

“I understand Lord Arthur.”

“Speaking of which, has he agreed to our proposal?”

“Begrudgingly yes but it felt like he had other plans, for now, he agreed to assemble those runic devices at the four main gates.”

“Good, let us proceed with it then and if you’re still worried then we might have to find someone capable of a second opinion...”

“Yes Lord Arthur, I’ll see what I can do.”

Mary nodded with a smile and left the room while the young noble sat back on his chair with a tired expression. Things were looking up for him, the city didn’t take much of a hit during the whole cult fiasco and they managed to get rid of their hidden lair before anything got out of hand.

Just as he expected refugees from the cities that were affected started flooding in. This of course brought in more problems as some of them were found to be afflicted by the strange parasites. Various steps needed to be taken to ensure the safety of his citizens and the growth of this city.

“Everything is going well but...”

Another sigh escaped his mouth as he grabbed a parchment. Things were proceeding as he had planned but everything was moving at a snail's pace. Even though he was managing it well the growth was nothing extraordinary, something like this would not grab the attention of his father.

“I should go back to work... perhaps an opportunity will present itself to me, I can just do my best until then...”

...

“He he.”

“Could you stop grinning...”

“But Boss, how can I not be grinning? Those Union bastards must be seething with rage!”

“I guess they might be...”

“They must!”

Roland and Bernir were walking towards the city while the large mule golem was lumbering behind them. This time around he wasn't going to the dungeon for more mining materials instead, he was going to the city to start a new endeavor.

‘I can't stay in the dungeon forever so this might be a good change of pace... I'm still unsure if this is the right choice but thanks to that new skill it could be beneficial...’

A few weeks ago he was given another business opportunity. This time Arthur wanted him to install a few runic turrets at the city gates. The main reason was due to the existence of the cultists. New city guards were slowly being recruited as the population increased yet this was not quite enough. They needed more protection for the city and these mechanical turrets were supposed to be the answer.

At first he wanted to decline the offer. Placing his runic devices all over the place would bring unwanted eyes. It would also give anyone that wanted free reign to examine them and find out all of his secrets. Yet after further consideration, he realized that it was already too late to worry about such trivial things at this point in time.

The auction house was slowly being filled out with his golemic products and magical weapons. If anyone wanted to examine the runes that he was making then it wouldn't be that hard. They could also just come to his shop and get them directly from the source.

There were no such things as patent laws in this kingdom so anyone could copy his designs without him being able to do anything about it. This was fine as he had already done the same exact thing by just stealing runic schematics with his debugging skill. He would be a large hypocrite if he didn't see the double standard in that.

While there was a possibility of people reverse engineering his creations to find some type of countermeasure later, he just needed to keep altering his designs. Perhaps if someone actually found some type of backdoor it would help him progress.

Then there was the second reason that he was willing to go through with it. The turrets were still made by him so he would naturally be able to control them with the help of his skills. He would be placing these throughout the city and could always seek their aid if he found himself in trouble. Even if the guards at the location were against him, he could always interact with the turrets and order them to fire at whoever was against him.

These devices would mostly work through an exterior controller similar to the ones used for golems. Voiced commands were possible as always and only runesmiths or runemages would be able to directly interact with these runic machines. Yet even then it wasn't that easy to go around the locking mechanisms of these instruments.

After the master was registered it took some time for a new one to be integrated into the system. That is unless the creator was there as their unique mana signature was always present and could only be removed by another magical craftsman with comparable knowledge in the field.

Thus from his point of view, installing these turrets all over the city would just make the whole place a lot safer for him in the long run. There was also a secondary bonus, if these turrets meet the standards he might be able to mass produce them and get a massive amount of money and prestige. Even the Union Dwarves would not be able to shut him down in other places if he becomes a household name.

"Look at those bozos, they must be fuming."

"Just don't say it out loud, those guys are very prideful."

"Don't worry boss, if they try something I'll just blow them away with this!"

Bernir patted the side of his tool belt to which he had a portable runic gun strapped to. It came together with a small battery and could fire off a few blasts depending on the setting. This was something he and all of the other members of his shop carried with them, even Elodia was wearing one for protection.

"Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of..."

While rolling his eyes he glanced toward the group of dwarves. It seemed that the smell of money had taken them here. They could no longer sweep him under the rug, the city lord was on his side and if he was investing in the city then there was a lot of money to be made.

The Dwarves from the union like one thing more than their pride and that was money. For that, they would put their squabbles to the rest and he was not that much different. This was an opportunity to gain the upper hand and stick it to the union. They would probably try to provoke him and perhaps even undermine the whole procedure.

'If they try to sabotage anything I'll have a case against them though, they are probably not as stupid to try and pull something like that.'

Roland looked at the group of people that were gathered there. While he and Bernir would be assembling the turrets the dwarven craftsmen were responsible for the foundation. They would be the

ones to bring it up and fasten it to the wall. His job was to explain the way it worked and then perform some tests.

“So th' esteemed Runesmith has finally decided tae shaw up, you're late.”

“Nay, we aren't late, we are just on time, how about you learn to read a clock ya dolt.”

“What did ya say?”

“Ya heard me, I guess we shouldn't expect much from such an old fart.”

Bernir shrugged while shaking his head side to side. The group of dwarves looked at each other in astonishment. Dunan was one of the big wigs in this city and along with a small group of others was part of the union leaders here. They could never see another dwarf that was this young to berate an older craftsman.

“Bernir...”

‘I guess he has been holding in a lot for a while.’

This reminded Roland of a few talks the two had with each other. Bernir painted his youth as being pushed around by dwarves that didn't really consider him a part of their community due to his lineage. This was probably the first time that he was truly able to show what he had gained as his achievements were considerably greater than most of the dwarves in his age bracket.

The moment they arrived Roland could see the leader moving forward. He looked quite dissatisfied with the whole situation and was certainly using excuses to throw in some jabs. This was not something his trusty assistant would allow though. While Roland had kind of accepted what had happened to him, Bernir was pettier than that.

If no one did anything then the two would probably continue to sling words at each other, perhaps it could even dissolve into a fistfight. If that happened he would probably need to jump in to save his assistant who was probably behind in stat points. However, a sudden change in the conversation forced his hand as Dunan decided to go for the lower-hanging fruit.

“That's why half breeds like you are...”

Before the dwarven leader could finish the sentence a loud explosion-like sound caused everyone to jump back. When everyone turned to the source they saw red sparks of energy gathered around Roland's metallic gloves.

“Dunan was it? It would be better if you didn't finish that sentence...”

He came from a more modern world and never could understand the fixation on people's birth. Though even the world's system was skewed in favor of the nobles by the sheer fact of some special classes and titles existing. Perhaps the only reason he was able to gain the Runesmith Lord class was thanks to his father being a Baron or a Knight.

In his eyes, everyone was the same, what decided a person's worth was not the circumstances around their birth but how they conducted themselves. Actions spoke louder than words and he would not allow anyone to belittle his friends in front of him.

“Whit's th' meaning o' this? Ye threatening me?”

“Threatening? No, this was just a friendly suggestion from a fellow craftsman.”

“My my, I was wondering why it was so lively today, if it isn't Mr. Wayland and Mr. Dunan~”

Roland's eyes moved to the side from where the woman's voice came from. There he saw the city lord's maid slowly moving towards them while not making a sound as always. Her feet weren't leaving any footprints behind which just made things a bit concerning.

“Good that ye'r 'ere, go 'n' tell th' lord about this unreasonable hoodlum!”

“Oh? Where is this hoodlum you speak off, I don't see anyone that fits that description.”

Mary moved her palm to her forehead and started looking around playfully. It was clear what she was doing but this only made the dwarf go red in the face. Thanks to her appearing on the scene he was able to remove the sparkling effects from his gauntlet. There was a lot of work to be done and even though these guys didn't like them, he would complete the assignment given to him.

“Now then gentlemen, the Lord wishes to express his gratitude for seeing past your grievances and working together. He hopes that this will be a great opportunity for everyone involved!”

‘Opportunity my ass, they probably just want to see how I work...’

Roland had to stop himself from rolling his eyes at the speech Mary made. It was clear that he was just here to earn money and spread his influence. The other's motivation was probably quite similar. Thus to speed things up he finally decided to call his golem over, doing it with the help of his skill which did raise some eyebrows.

‘It doesn't seem to be a widespread skill then...’

While he didn't want to reveal his cards to his so-called enemy he was interested to know about the limitations of the regular Runesmith class. This he could mostly decipher from the dwarves as they did wear their hearts on their sleeves. They were interested in the slow-moving golem that just went to the right location and started opening itself up on its own accord. From within everyone could see what looked like a magical turret along with a few other things.

“Well then, please carry those out and organize them as I tell you to, of course if that's fine with you?”

Roland looked towards Mary and then at Dunan and the rest of the dwarves. Their leader after glaring back, turned to the maid and just nodded. Finally, they started unpacking with some luck they would be able to assemble the two that were brought over for today and then move on to arm the rest of the city gates.

Chapter 256: Freedom!

Name :

Roland Arden L 160

Classes:

T2 Runesmith Lord L 50 [Secondary]

T2 Runic Engineer L 35 [Primary]

T1 Mage L25 [Tertiary]

T1 Runic Mana Scribe L 25 [X]

T1 Runic Blacksmith L 25 [X]

'Doesn't look like much but it's become harder now...'

Roland glanced at his level that had reached a hundred sixty. There were only fifteen levels left which didn't seem like much but he had caught up to the monster levels of the creatures inside of this dungeon. It would probably take a while until he maxed out his class but even then it would be much faster than what a regular person needed to go through.

'It feels like I'm on vacation when I'm here... at least I can offset some of the leveling with crafting.'

"Awoof!"

"Yeah, I'm coming."

Agni wiggled his behind side to side while looking towards the wall where the exit was. They had stayed here for another couple of days but more work had to be done. He had just finished outfitting the city gates with the turrets but the lord wanted more. Now came his private estate and then perhaps more orders for armor enchantment or weapon enchantment.

Ever since he returned from the gold rank test mission he felt like he was working constantly. He wasn't even able to enjoy his and Elodia's nights together as he had to get up early. This of course caused all of his work-related skills to go up. Stress Resistance was already at level six while Resilience was at level five.

He was not sure how this happened but it seemed that he was under the constant stress of the deadline which worked wonders in leveling these skills. Then the little sleep he got continued to boost the resilience skill that helped him recover. With it around, there was no need for stamina potions or coffee.

'After I get to tier 3 I'll take a whole month off...'

It was time to leave this place and the spider drones would take care of it. The strange Lich that appeared once never graced him with his presence again and even when he used the secondary opening it was not there. It seemed to be in a different kind of sequence than the other undead monsters.

This was something everyone knew, dungeon monsters seemed to have specific programming that they needed to follow. Sometimes it would get changed but most of the time the monsters stuck to the exact same routes. This was used by adventurers to set up various traps or get themselves into favorable positions like getting the high ground. This might have sounded like an easy cheat but it had its downsides.

The monsters tended to look exactly the same so a person never knew on which exact route they mostly were. Only the rare field bosses were mostly the ones getting documented. It was the same for the

10th-level boss that had its fighting patterns and variations all written down. It made fighting it much easier even for an under-leveled party.

“AWoo!”

“Yeah I’m coming, you really don’t like to be bored, Agni.”

Roland didn’t experience much trouble after getting back from his last expedition. The weeks continued to pass and he was slowly progressing towards his end destination. It would probably take at least another half a year or perhaps more to get those fifteen levels. This was already an astonishing speed not normally achieved by people with no backing.

‘I wouldn’t be surprised if there aren’t that many people within my age bracket that are over level one hundred and fifty...’

While opening the hidden exit and waiting for the mule golem to get through it he glanced at the closed dungeon opening. Without this discovery, it would have not been possible. There weren’t many places in the world that were this tailor-made for his advancement. In a regular tier 3 dungeon, there would not be a place where he could place a giant cannon and just constantly kill powerful monsters with them.

Due to the experience point split, people were unable to power level. If a noble brought many bodyguards that did too much damage they would not gain much even if they delivered the final blow. Disabling a monster or knocking them out by a strong fighter before the kill would also lower the experience gain dramatically. The only way to really counter these limits was to use powerful magical tools. As long as the skill or spell came from the person holding the tool it would count.

‘What’s up next? The turrets are ready, I should probably make more golems and start looking into that geothermal generator blueprint.’

After achieving his goal Roland was ready to give this place up. There was a limit to what he could gain from it. It would probably be better to just allow people to discover the tier 3 dungeon. Later after it was somewhat mapped out he could just enter it to farm the powerful monsters himself. When he achieved his own tier 3 class they would probably not pose a big threat anymore.

...

The voice was gone for a while but it could feel that it was temporary. The strange mana that was absorbed previously wasn’t enough. Yet it didn’t want to risk death, the energy waves that were coming from the hidden wall continued to get stronger. For some reason, the moment the voice died down it became very protective of its own well-being. It was better to use the other empty puppets to siphon trace amounts of energy.

While it continued to seek a way out of this place it was unable to leave. There seemed to be another invisible wall keeping it from escaping. After going through all the corridors it could find, it discovered two flights of stairs. One of them was heading up while the other was down. Regretfully it was unable to pass through the threshold.

Whatever it attempted to do, it had failed. Only inanimate objects were able to get through to the other side while it and all the other similar skeletal beings were not. This was a prison that it couldn’t leave

and the longer it stayed the more it could feel the pressure of the voice. Even though it was gone now it knew that it was only a matter of time before it returned.

The mana source that was keeping it going some days vanished for a long time. A strange foreboding feeling kept crawling into the Lich's mind. What if the mana that was helping it function outside of the voice disappeared? Without it around it would revert to the mindless drone like all the others.

But how could it go out? The Lich had tried to leave through all the openings it could discover. After a while, it decided to concentrate on the area through which the other mana types appeared from. In its mind, it was more likely to find a clue there. From the staircase, it could even feel the voice's influence being stronger which drove it back to where it all happened.

The mana attack ceased which the Lich used to get closer. It was somewhat able to predict when this unruly force would stop and never return. There was always a certain timeframe it used and didn't go beyond it for some reason. Perhaps it needed to recharge itself before the next time?

Yet after another bout of hitting or scratching the wall nothing ever came of it. Without any new clues, it returned to the nearby chamber where something it had previously encountered remained. It was stashed in a safe location where the others couldn't get it and still contained a bit of the strange mana pattern.

This blue construct that looked like an arachnid wandered into the chamber one day. The Lich was awakened that day and slowly reached this point where it was fully conscious. It cherished this strange wreck that was a mangled mess of metal now. Only parts of it remained which it tried to reassemble back into its original shape.

It was its treasure that allowed it to become what it is today. But it could feel that the dungeon's corruption was running its course. In time this item would be polluted with the other mana and lose its original worth. The Lich was unwilling to let its treasure be affected by the annoying voice that commanded it to do its bidding.

Then it dawned on him, a plan that might actually work. It remembered the other similarly-looking metallic bug almost wandering into this place. It was able to pass through the hidden passage, what if this thing that he was holding could do the same?

The Lich quickly grabbed the busted-up spider drone and made his way to the place through which the beam of light shot through about half an hour ago. The mana in the air was still filled with the pattern which would probably make this the best moment. Instead of hitting the wall again this time around it pushed the blue scrap metal against it. To its surprise, the thing that he was holding was able to push through it. Only when the bony digits holding onto it pressed to the wall was the Lich unable to progress further.

A round of tests was started, what remained from the metallic spider was a damaged chassis with some legs dangling from it. The Lich could feel resistance when he tried pushing this rounded piece through the hole. When doing this it seemed as if the metal was vanishing inside the wall. Finally, it performed the task it came here for, by sticking its hand inside of the golem remains it tried to push its hand beyond the point it was allowed to.

Its eyes lit up with the green flames as it felt no resistance. It had to hold itself back from pushing its entire arm through the wall. It was sure that the moment its bony parts touched the invisible barrier it would be stuck there. Instead, it pulled out the rounded metal and started pacing back and through the room. Its mind was going wild with an idea that it was trying to justify. If it was successful then it would be free but if not, then it would surely die.

When trying to make a decision it spotted one of its unawakened brethren lumbering into this very area. It just looked at the Lich without reacting and slowly went on its way. The sight of that drone-like behavior put the nail in the coffin, the Lich needed to escape and it would rather die than be turned back into a mindless minion.

The plan was quite peculiar and for it to work it needed to make sure that there were no obstructions in the way. For this purpose, it stuck its hand into the golem's corpse and started pushing what seemed to be rocks on the other side out of the way. Only after it couldn't feel any resistance did the monster decide to go through with the risky endeavor.

A green crystal that was the source of its very being was usually placed behind its ribcage. This object when destroyed would mean its death so it was sure to place it in a spot that couldn't be easily reached or breached. Now on the other hand it decided to guide it towards its skull.

This was the same thing it did when the beam of mana struck its body. The core could be similarly moved by the Lich like by slime monsters. The only restriction was the bones in its body. The opening through which the spine connected to its cranium was a perfect fit for the core to slip through and now that it was safe the monster dislodged its head.

It was a high-level undead that could even propel its bones with the help of its mana. Something like removing its bony visage was child's play and would not even hurt it. The head was then shoved into the remains of the golem. If the creature could it would surround its whole body with the metal and walk through but this was the next best thing.

The skeletal body without the head could still perceive the whole area even without the head. It was a creature composed of magic and the core was mimicking things like senses that allowed it to see and sense its surroundings. Finally, it was time to make the journey outside this prison. If the Lich was successful then what awaited it outside was the truth and freedom. If it was wrong then it would at least know what was out there before its flame was extinguished.

The skeleton's body took on a throwing stance by holding the head in its right hand. Promptly it lobbed its central body part towards the wall through which the beam of mana always came through. When it came time to collide with the wall the mangled metal faded through the barrier between dungeons and went through it without any problems.

It instantly could feel the loss of connection to the rest of its body that just crumbled to a pile of bones the moment it passed the threshold. The monster wasn't aware of what was on the other side so it decided to use all of its physical power for the throw. This propelled it into the hidden mining area through which it collided with several protruding rock formations before slowly rolling before a pool of lava.

The Lich was instantly taken aback by what it was sensing. The Mana pattern from the previous home was gone and it was replaced by something similar but much weaker. This other voice attempted to interface itself with its core but was unable to get through as it was quickly repelled by the Lich's magical power.

This new area it reached was different, the mausoleum-like esthetic was gone and replaced by various colorful minerals. It felt victorious, the freedom and truth it wanted were becoming a fact. Yet then noticed something peculiar, another creature was there and it was slowly rising from within the lava pool.

A being not of bone but of flesh emerged that this monster was not familiar with. The mana pattern was different from what it was used to and one thing was clear, this was not an ally. Before the Lich could react its head was being chomped on by an overgrown lizard. Yet the scaly enemy had misread the situation as instead of an easy meal it found itself unable to close its mouth. The skull of the Lich that it was trying to chomp down on proved to be too much.

Suddenly a burst of green flames escaped from the salamander. They came from the skull that quickly incinerated this low-level tier 2 creature into nothing more than black bones. This wasn't quite the end of it as the darkened bones started to assemble themselves into something. They slowly floated towards the now free Lich to form its new body.

While they didn't fit the human skeleton that this Infernal Lich was based on, they changed shape to slowly fill the desired frame. The monster was now standing on its own two feet while looking into the new area it arrived in. This regeneration process was something it was expecting but thanks to the appearance of the salamander it had been hastened.

A clattering of bones filled the entire area filled with strange minerals. There were no other living beings around for the skeleton to contend with but it could feel more of them outside of these walls. The range of its skill was limited but it could feel some strange mana signatures down the open tunnel it was staring at.

The monster was finally free, the voice that bothered it was no more. It quickly glanced at the opening it came from and could see the broken wall. The old dungeon was still there along with the corridor that it came through. From this place, it could see inside of it and it was in no rush to go back to its old prison.

Yet it was confused, where did that third mana pattern originate from? There were faint traces of it in this room but nothing that was as powerful as that blue beam of light. This whole room was filled with it but it seemed that the source was now gone. It wanted to study the source of its newfound freedom but it wasn't here. Perhaps if it went through this new place it would find the thing that released it into this world...