

Runesmith 261

Chapter 261: Helpless Adventurers

“Where the hell did these bastards come from? Why are there so many of them?”

Armand shouted while punting one of the blazing skeletal monsters away. To his dismay even though his opponent's body shattered from the powerful kick it just collided with a wall made of bones. This barrier of walking skeletons slowly closed in on them in this confined space.

“Just shut up and keep them away from the middle!”

Lobelia shouted while she and Jasmine continued firing arrows toward the monster's weak points. This was not as easy as with the Flaming Skeleton variants that roamed the upper levels. The lesser versions of these skeletons were quickly dispatched by just shattering their flaming heads. These blazing ones on the other hand were more varied.

The weak point was still indicated by the flames but these spread out from their rib cages and spread throughout their whole body. With Lobelia's keen eyesight she could see where these flames were focusing from. This was the weak spot that needed to be struck to defeat them. If the weak point wasn't hit then the monsters could still move even if their bodies were shattered.

This was happening to the ones Korgak the half-orc was contending with. The large green man was just swinging a large two-handed battle axe around. Some of the monsters that were cleaved in half continued with their assault by crawling on the ground. He had to continuously crush their heads and chests with his feet to finally defeat them.

“We can't just stay here, we need to push through, can you do it?”

Even though some of the skeletons could be tossed down into the chasm it was also somewhere they would end up if this continued. Lobelia could only think of one possibility and that was to use Armand's and Wedamir's strength to push the blazing skeletons aside while making a run for it.

Both of them had skills that could temporarily enhance their power and speed. In theory, it could work as their enemies were still only lower tier 2 monsters that were made up of bones. They weren't all that heavy so pushing them aside through a combined effort wasn't that outlandish.

“Need me to make some space?”

Armand looked at Wedamir who just nodded and pushed the tower shield he was holding towards the monsters. The tactic was easy, the dwarf would go first, and then Armand would burst through the middle right after. His martial artists-like skills required a bit of a charge-up but they were quite powerful. While he was gathering the required energy resource that his class specialized in, the dwarf was slowly pushing the monsters away with the help of his defensive skill.

Wedamir's body gave off a faint blue glow as his skill was activated. His steps became slower but each time he took it the ground started to crack. The monsters that tried pushing toward him found themselves unable to, it was as if he had become a moving wall that they couldn't get through.

The skill that Wedamir was using was called 'Moving Fortress' and allowed the tank from the party to increase their weight while also producing an area of impenetrable force around them. The increase in

mass and density allowed the user to shrug off a lot of attacks and also go against larger beasts without getting knocked away. In this case, it was enough to push the mass of skeletons away while also managing to make them fall into the chasm.

Yet it had a downside of using up a lot of the skill user's stamina in the process. The longer Wedamir kept it up the more out of breath he became. But his aim was not to push these monsters away but to force more of them into one concentrated area. Then it would be up to Armand who had a more penetrative skill at his disposal.

Soon it was time, Armand's whole body began to expand and his skin became dark crimson. More veins than usual appeared as he had to initiate one of the berserker skills that he had grown slowly accustomed to. A red aura of swirling energy surrounded him and condensed around his shoulder area which would be used to focus most of the power too.

"Korgak, get ready, we are going to make a run for it!"

Korgak that had to contend with the backline alone, was already bleeding. Only thanks to his vitality and stamina was he able to last this long while going against a swarm of skeletons with almost no help from the others. After the signal was given he was quick to deliver a ferocious side cleave to the charging skeletons before turning around and running.

At the same time, he could see Armand taking off towards the condensed group of skeletons that were forced together by their dwarven ally. Armand's enlarged body was giving off steam along with a strange reddish aura. This aura had formed into a face of a tiger that formed around the shoulder area that would be the initial point of impact.

Armand bolted forward while leaving the imprints of his feet on the hard rocky floor. Wedamir on cue stepped to the side to not get hit as he knew that his human friend would not be able to change his trajectory after activating this skill of his. A roar that sounded like a tiger flew by him and collided with the wall of skeletons.

It was working, the monsters were too feeble to block the ferocious tackle. It seemed that the group would be getting out of this alive. If they managed to get through the boney roadblock it was smooth sailing from there. Yet this wouldn't be happening, about half way through the charge Armand noticed something, there was a spike in mana that even people without a proper mana sense skill could feel.

"What the!?"

He shouted as he collided with a wall made of bones. This barrier wasn't that simple, it was composed of not only bones but some kind of green swirling flames. When Armand connected with it he could feel as if he collided with something made from magical metal. Instead of getting through, he could feel his own body breaking.

With all his might he tried giving it all but his momentum was stopped and instead of getting through he got injured himself. The rebound from this collision tossed him back into the arms of his dwarven companion that wasn't far behind.

"Oh no, Armand!"

Lobelia screamed out as she could see her brother's right shoulder and whole arm getting limp. Blood sprouted from it and was followed by a small fountain from his mouth. Their escape attempt had failed but the wall of flaming bones wasn't the only surprise. Normally they expected the blazing skeletons to attack them immediately when they now had the chance.

"Wait... why did they stop?"

Instead of going right after them, the monsters halted their attack. Soon the group realised why, the reason for them to halt, and for the wall of bones appeared before them. The monster that was probably responsible for the disappearances of the adventurers was there and it was not something that they were expecting.

"Is... is that a Lich?"

Jasmine stuttered as she was the first one to spot the monster that was floating above the whole scene. After the blocking spell was cast it made itself known to the adventurer party and it was clearly stopping its minions from attacking them.

"Why would a tier 3 monster be in this dungeon? Did the guild lie to us?"

Lobelia looked toward the floating necromancer that was just there staring at them. Even though she couldn't identify the creature through an identification skill it was an obvious tier 3 monster. It was possible for a skeletal mage-type monster to exist but this one was certainly not acting like one.

Those variants were not able to control other skeletons, the ones that could were Liches and they only existed from tier 3 and onwards. The strategy was always to get rid of the Lich that was controlling the swarm of minions. They could multiply their ranks without an end and were considered more dangerous than most tier 3 monsters of the same level.

"Fuck, this doesn't look good..."

Armand gritted his teeth while slowly getting off the ground. While the enemies stopped moving a different spectacle was taking place. Their master radiated a strange green flame that seeped into the destroyed minions. Soon the cracks that formed in their white bodies started mending themselves and the small army was quickly restored. All the ground that they managed to take back had been taken away.

"Should we try going the other way?"

Asked Jasmine while looking towards Korgak that was looking to the others for aid.

"I don't think that thing will let us escape you saw that wall of bones... we might be royally fucked here..."

Lobelia commented while glaring at the monster. Both sides were blocked and running away was probably not an option. She expected the monster to put up another barrier if they went the other way. The small amount of space they had to move was the main problem here. The chasm was wide and also very deep, it was certain death if they fell down there.

However, Lobelia remembered something from the past. There was a person that managed to get back alive from a fall here and she knew him. Perhaps it was worth taking the plunge instead of contending

with all of these monsters. Both options were really bad, either die from falling down or be devoured by undead creatures.

“If Wayland did it then perhaps...”

She looked towards the darkness that was below. All of her instincts were telling her that it was a bad idea. Perhaps it was better to toss themselves against these monsters, even with the tier 3 monster there one person might still make it out alive.

To her surprise when she was glancing down another option presented itself to her. Her eyesight was one of the best here and without it, Lobelia wouldn't be able to see it. Yet there it was, a light at the end of the tunnel. The monster they were against was also acting strange as it stopped in its tracks and was actually looking down into the chasm instead.

“Everyone, you'll have to trust me on this one... we need to jump down and do it right now!”

...

“Hm...”

“Awoo?”

Roland along with Agni stepped into the underground chamber. He had come here for the usual grinding session while his spider drones mined for more minerals. After being here multiple times he had an idea of the respawn times of some of the rarer metals. The red mythrill ore for instance took over a month to appear again.

This was not the problem though, as he was going through the dungeon this time around there was a decrease in monster numbers. This did not affect the sword dinosaur boss and the lesser monsters in the tunnels. However, it was affecting this place as there was not even a single salamander or a slug creature to be seen anywhere.

‘The radar isn't picking up anything either...’

This entire area had been equipped with his map-enhancing equipment. The sensors were dug deep into the walls and even people with enhanced mana senses wouldn't be able to tell that they were there. Roland was concerned that if this place was discovered people could also find his runic equipment.

It wouldn't be strange if they came to him to ask why there were runic contraptions in a secret mining area. If they dug in deeper and brought some specialists the runes would be attributed to him as there always existed a pattern. This pattern could be easily recognized by higher-level rune mages or runesmiths.

Thanks to these creations of his he could extend the range of his map. There he could see a clear lack of any monster in the vicinity. This was strange as there was always at least one salamander to greet them in the main chamber and then several other monsters in the tunnel leading to the chasm. Now on the other hand there was none here and only one in the tunnel.

‘Why is that monster at the edge of the tunnel... did it go for the camouflage I made?’

That was the original entrance to the mining area that he discovered during the expedition with his brother. To prevent people from getting here from the outside he had concealed it. There, it would mostly just look like a regular rocky wall but in reality, it was fake. Now a monster was standing in the spot it was not.

Roland gave out a sigh while ordering the golems to start mining. The number of the spider golems had also increased to ten and some of them were also working on the wall leading to the other dungeon. While they got things ready here he needed to see what that monster was up to there. If he had destroyed his camouflage then it just increased the workload.

“Let’s go Agni.”

“Woof!”

To Agni, it wasn’t a problem as he never really had much to do after getting here. The monster respawned after a day and fell to his fangs quite easily. Now that the usual salamander was gone he was itching for some action.

The two went towards the corridor and Roland kept an eye on his map for any potential problems. Even before getting in he felt that something was off, the mine looked the same as always but for some reason, he wasn’t feeling it. His hunch was a bullseye as when he got to the end of the tunnel the monster was not the type he expected it to be.

“Why is that thing here...”

There it was, a skeletal warrior with a flaming upper body and head. It was not something that should be able to spawn here and there was also another problem. Thanks to his high analyzing skill he could pierce through the truth, this monster was not an actual dungeon monster. The reanimated part in the name implied that this monster was raised from a corpse. This body probably belonged to one of the monsters in the dungeon. A summon skeleton spell was part of the necromancer repertoire. It could create a skeleton even from a monster’s body, it did not require the skeleton inside to be from a humanoid, the magic would bend it into the required shape. This one’s weapon was also made from bone which implied even further that it had been created here.

“AWooo!”

Agni was quick on the uptake and more than this monster could ever hope to defeat. It took a moment for the skeleton to have its skull chopped into pieces and its rib cage smashed. The coast was clear but what could have made this creature and why was his hole cover gone?

He took a step towards it, and the opening that he tried to hide from the outside was clearly revealed. The map-enhancing devices didn’t show any more monsters but this didn’t mean that he could just relax. It was possible for the person who conjured this skeleton to be here. Perhaps some kind of necromancer was trying to make his mining spot his new lair?

‘Did they come from outside and left the skeleton here to guard it? But a reanimated skeleton can’t survive too long without the caster being near it... wait what if...’

Roland quickly looked in the direction of the mining chamber. There his spider drones were already working on the opening to his grind spot. In it, there was a Lich monster that would in theory be able to

create these types of tier 2 skeletons from the monster scattered here. Was it able to cast its spell from within its dungeon or was it able to make it out here?

Before he could examine the issue any further he noticed that some smaller rocks and dust were falling. The source of the debris was from within the chasm and when he looked up there was quite an interesting thing falling.

“Huh?”

With a quick step back he watched the upper body part of a blazing skeleton falling down. It barely missed the opening he was in and continued to fall down along with more rocks. There was something happening up there as some more skeletal remains continued to tumble down into the abyss.

Thus the only thing left to do was to activate all the magical spells that could clear away the foggy surroundings and enhance his view. For a better vantage point, he even decided to create a temporary platform with the help of earth magic that he could stand on while looking.

“... What is happening up there... are those adventurers?”

While he couldn't totally make out who it was, there was a fight up there and the skeletons that were falling down had to belong to whoever left this one here...

Chapter 262: Leap of faith

Before him, a strange scene that he wasn't expecting was playing out. Normally Roland wouldn't be able to see anything when looking up. The only reason now was a strange clearing up of the fog that mostly barred anyone from peeking through. Together with the latest enhancements to his eyesight-boosting spells, there was a tiny bit that he noticed.

There were people getting pushed against the edge of the chasm. He could not really tell who they were with his eyes but his mapping device was different. Previously he had done some experiments with some of his weapons. He wanted to see if he could include them in his map display to know whenever a person with this weapon was near.

There were two of his better runic creations up there, one he made for Armand and the other for Lobelia. The main reason was at first a joke, he wanted to just avoid the musclebound idiot whenever in the dungeons or outside. Yet now he was sure that it was him and his sister that were close to falling down.

‘These skeletons aren't that strong... could that thing be up there with them?’

Roland wasn't sure if the Lich that he saw within the other dungeon was the true perpetrator just yet. It was still possible that some kind of necromancer was behind it all. There was a possibility that this person discovered his secret mining area and decided to take it over.

Perhaps Armand and the adventurers up to had been unlucky and ran into him as he was going out from the chasm. To his knowledge tier 3 magical classes were able to produce a levitation spell. While it was nowhere near a flight spell it was enough to move the caster up and down in places and would be perfect to enter the mine from this side.

‘Either way, If I don't help them they will die...’

A Lich or a powerful Necromancer didn't change much, they both had to be strong enough to push back Armand and Lobelia along with three other people back. It looked like they were going to fall which indicated that they were surrounded by those blazing skeletons. Quite a bit of them had fallen down here and there were probably more.

However this was troublesome, the area where he was was more than a kilometer away from them. The bumpy terrain also didn't leave space for maneuvering, if they didn't fall directly towards his location they would just go down and probably die somewhere below.

'Will they even jump down or get pushed?'

He wasn't sure about anything but he used his large mana pool to try to enhance his detection devices even further. To get a better signal he took out a small disk from a spatial satchel and threw it up towards the direction of the fight. As the disk rose in height it started giving off a brownish glow. When close to the end of its flight this glow caused it to stick to the wall like a magnet.

This runic implement was a signal amplification device, with it he could get a better grasp of the situation that was happening up there. With its help, he could clearly see a group of five adventurers that were all above level one hundred. It was a party made up of gold ranks and they were surrounded by reanimated skeletons.

Yet the more interesting circle was slightly behind the large group of blazing skeletons. With this Roland had his answer, the one responsible for all of this wasn't a Necromancer, it was a high-level monster instead. The color of the dot and its size indicated that a tier 3 monster was standing a bit away from the swarm of its minions that were pushing into Armand's group.

'Could it really be that strange Lich? How did it get out? Is this all my fault?'

There were a myriad of questions going through his head but they mostly went towards one point, how was this thing able to get out of the dungeon? Roland was almost positive that it probably had something to do with his involvement with the other dungeon. It would be too much of a coincidence if it wasn't due to his excessive grinding habits.

This was an unprecedented situation that he had no knowledge of ever happening before. Only one situation was somewhat similar but it didn't really involve two different dungeons interacting with each other.

A dungeon break was the closest thing he could come up with. It was a situation in which monsters could go outside and no one had a proper explanation for why this happened to this day. This Lich had been able to escape to this dungeon so it wouldn't be strange if it could go outside of it as well.

'What will happen to Albrook if that thing gets out?'

Roland tried recalling the level of the Lich, it was close to level hundred sixty but now it had become free of the dungeon. Monsters just like humans could raise their levels by killing other beings in this world. It was clear by the many skeletons that it was summoning that it had been clearing out the creatures from this dungeon.

There was one difference between necromancers that were still alive and Liches. The summoned creatures would weigh hard on the caster's soul. This limited the necromancer's creature pool but it

wasn't the same for the Lich. That monster didn't have a soul or was never a person, to begin with. Its minion count was mostly unlimited, until it was alive it could just produce more and more monsters.

Various scenes went through his head in just a fraction of a second before he decided to act. Even though the monster was out there he could not do anything about it now. The people up there probably needed his help and the only way for that to happen is if they noticed him or fell down.

First, with the help of his earth runes, he started to produce a sturdy platform on which he would be able to support more than just himself. The shape of it was also quite unique as it began to take the shape of a large bowl.

This would only work if he managed to get Armand and Lobelia safely towards the tunnel. The foundation was created, with somewhere for them to fall towards but he also needed to make the party aware of his presence.

For this he had two options, make himself visible through bright light or through loud sounds. The latter would be harder as to the nature of the walls here. They were from a strange rock that liked to absorb sound, even if he produced a loud bang the sound would probably not find its way into Lobelia's ears.

The first option of making it bright was the next best thing. Probably the Lich had done something to the fog that was usually blocking the view. Thanks to his mana sense he could feel that some kind of spell had been cast, perhaps during the Lich's ascend up he had somehow removed it.

This spell wouldn't last forever as he could already see some dark mist coming back from the sides. Thus he threw a few more disks up towards a few locations. These were not as intricate as the previous one that magnified the signal instead, they just produced a bright blinking light.

To top it all off he fiddled with his runic programming to produce a bright spell which he shot up over his head, if this light show didn't produce the effect then he wasn't sure what would. There was also a code inserted into the light. This code had its own morse code analog that he set up with a hidden message. People like Lobelia or any tracker should be able to figure out what the blinking meant.

"They really jumped down..."

In all honesty, Roland wasn't sure that even if Lobelia saw him down there she would just jump. Some adventurers would see a more favorable outcome to just toss themselves against the Lich and hope that at least some of them got away. Yet there they were, trusting in the light show that he was producing.

To not be a disappointment to the people that put their faith in him he went to the second phase of his plan. It would have been nice if he had any gravity runes that he could use. They would be perfect to cushion their descent but he would need to go with the next best thing, wind, and water.

While he was producing the light show he had already used his feet to produce a simple water creation spell. The shape of the bowl was to hold it in place and the wind spell he was about to shoot up would dampen the fall enough for them not to die before hitting the water. The biggest issue here was the limited space and then the hasty process of this entire construct.

"Ahhhhh..."

"I'm going to haunt you forever if I dieeeeeee!"

“Uooohhhh...”

Roland could finally hear some voices as the party of five descended from above. Most of them were shouting but one voice that probably belonged to Armand was constantly yelling at someone. Soon they would be hit by a giant twister made up of green energy due to the mana that produced it. This torrent of winds would try to push them up while soon after suddenly pulling them towards the basin of water.

This was not an easy feat to achieve even for an experienced mage. Roland really had to strain his multiple pseudo brains that his Parallel Thinking trait gave him. When straining all three that he had access to at the moment he was somewhat able to guide the falling people down into the pool of water he created.

‘Shit it won’t hold...’

Yet after the initial splash, the hastily produced platform couldn’t hold and the group of five went through it. Roland had somewhat expected this to happen and so he shifted to plan B which he had also prepared. This one was a lot less refined as it involved just two sturdy magical ropes that he wrapped around his arms.

These ropes were made from special materials that would allow the infusion of mana. After injecting mana into them the caster could make them move like extensions of their body. It took a few tries to get the hang of it but Roland had already gone through the training. At the moment of impact and destruction of his pool, he executed his rescue plan.

Both of the magical ropes shot out to entangle the closest people there. Instantly after the entanglement, he could feel a large amount of force pulling him down. He had to quickly activate all of his strength buffing spells as well as some that would make his footing stable. Along with these he also felt a ruby tail wrapping itself around his waist as Agni attempted to aid him in this rescue endeavor.

“Shit... we are alive! Haha, I’m alive!”

“Will you shut up already, we aren’t safe yet!”

The first one to call out was Armand and he was quickly shot down by Lobelia. On one side he entangled Armand, Lobelia, and some dwarf that he had never seen before. On the other side, there was a large Half-Orc that he was familiar with together with another woman adventurer that he somewhat recalled seeing at the guild once or twice.

“... Stop moving around so much...”

Roland called out to the people dangling on the ropes. It was already a miracle that his half-assed plan had worked, he actually expected some of them to tumble down. Luckily the increase in strength thanks to his leveling spree allowed him to be able to support even five people with part of their gear intact. Some of their weapons had been tossed into the dark abyss below but that wasn’t that important.

“Wayland, is that you? What the hell are you doing here?”

“We’ll talk later, I’ll pull you up now...”

Instead of chatting, he started pulling everyone into the tunnel opening. Armand was quick to quiet down as he finally realized what kind of situation he was in. Slowly the first person that was Lobelia

managed to grab the ledge and pull herself up. Then it was Armand and the other woman that he recognized from the guild. Soon all of them were safe and hugging the ground under them.

“Let’s never do that again...”

Lobelia gave out a sigh while panting, beads of sweat dripping from her forehead. The decision she made was luckily the right one. During the scuffled up top, she had noticed the blinking lights and the hidden message behind them. It was just one word, jump. Normally she wouldn’t have taken this gamble but the image of Wayland popped into her head which pushed her into going with her instincts and jumping.

“Aye.”

Wedamir slowly dusted himself off while glancing down towards the rest of the chasm. Even before the jump, he was forced to let go of his tower shield which a large number of monsters was clinging to. Now he was only left with his halberd while Korgak on the other hand was missing his axe.

“Korgak glad.”

The half-orc nodded towards Roland that was standing there and also sweating. The whole rescue mission was over but now he had some explaining to do. He was sure that the group would ask about the reason for him being here. While perhaps Armand and Lobelia would keep their mouths shut, the other three were different. Before they could work this out, however, they needed to make sure that they were truly safe.

“Are you just going to be quiet or will you explain yourself, Wayland? What are you doing here?”

The one prying wasn’t actually Armand, instead, Lobelia quickly jumped off the ground and started shouting at him. She was clearly shaken by the near-death experience so he decided not to get into a shouting match and first to calm things down.

“I... this is a secret area that I discovered.”

“A secret area?”

There was no use lying about it now. For them to get out of here he needed to guide them through the secret passages anyway. It was better to just come clean but he still just could keep the other dungeon secret for the time being. Even if it was revealed his connection to the Lich could probably not be proven.

Nothing like this had happened before so he was not actually sure if this wouldn’t have happened eventually even if he didn’t come here. At least that was what he was trying to tell himself. If this was all his fault then he was probably responsible for the deaths the Lich had caused. While he wasn’t directly responsible for the Lich coming here, probably some fault was on his side.

“Yes you’ll see it soon but could you explain one thing to me, what happened up there? What’s with all those skeletons?”

Roland also wanted some answers, what was the Lich doing up there? There was still time to get out of the dungeon and seal it. After evacuating all the lower ranked adventurers they could procure platinum rank adventurers. Together with gold and silver ranks, they would probably be able to kill the lich that

could only create lower-level tier 2 monsters. Their numbers could be dwindled by their gold and silver ranks while the platinum went for the kill.

“The skeletons? Sure...”

Lobelia started explaining everything while the group of five started moving away from the tunnel entrance. Roland on the other hand peeked his head out towards the runic items that were left behind in the walls. With the signal enhancer there he was still able to see the group of skeletons roaming the area before the chasm.

“What is it doing...? Fuck... we need to move!”

“Huh? What’s wrong? You were the one that wanted me to explain eve...”

“That’s not important, that thing, I mean the Lich... it jumped down, it will be here soon...”

“Huh? It jumped down?”

“Yes, Liches have levitation spells, it will be able to get in here, now go!”

The whole party glanced at each other before quickly bolting towards the unlit tunnel. They were unwilling to fight a tier 3 monster even if it was six against one. The only realistic way out of this was to escape...