

Runesmith 263

Chapter 263: The chase begins.

“Hey wait up... Hey! Is that thing really following us? and if it is, where are you taking us, what is this place?”

“I’ll explain later, you’ll have to trust me.”

“Trust you?”

Lobelia wanted to roll her eyes as she sprinted after the man dressed in full-body armor. To the side, she could see a ruby dire wolf running behind him and behind her were the other four party members she came with. All of them were in a daze after almost dying from the fall into the chasm. For a moment they thought they were safe but Wayland who they discovered here wasn’t of the same mind.

“Hey, are you sure that we can trust him?”

Jasmine appeared next to Lobelia and quickly used a hidden skill for forwarding information. It was called project sound, thanks to it the user could project sounds to any desired location. It was mostly used by thieves or scout classes to sneak around and confuse sentries.

However, it could also be used differently, by targeting someone's ear and turning down the sound volume a person could communicate from a distance. Attacking it by shattering someone's eardrums was also possible but only with a high enough skill level. Usually, there was not enough sound output for that, and pinpointing the right spot to his wasn’t easy either.

“My sister trusts him, so I’ll trust him too, do you think he would have saved us if he meant us harm?”

The archer nodded but Lobelia wasn’t sure if that was enough to drop the suspicion. In reality, she already had a theory of what had happened there and it was only confirmed after they arrived at a clearing. What they saw there was truly astonishing, all of them opened up their eyes to take in the view.

“What is this? Precious gems and metals? Hah, I knew you were hiding something!”

Armand shouted out while looking at the spider golems that were moving. The group was filled with adventurers so they somewhat knew that this place was akin to a goldmine. Dungeons always restored their mineral pockets with time. To them, it wasn’t that strange that Wayland had decided to keep this place to himself to keep the riches. If they were capable of doing the same they would probably do the same.

“By Felmjir’s beard, is that crimson mythril? And that’s... but this is...”

The only dwarf from the party stopped in his tracks while forgetting that they were being chased. To him, that was brought up around miners and blacksmiths, something like this was a true treasure trove. While he did not specialize in it as a dwarf he knew the true worth of a place like this. “... Brother Dunan was right, ye wur hiding something!”

“Brother?”

Roland gave out an order to the spider golems to stop mining the moment he ran into the range of his skill. As he was planning he implemented a relay system into his bots that would forward the order to all of them automatically. Thanks to this he didn't have to go through all ten of the golems one by one.

Some of the golems retreated towards the hidden exit while four others moved in the direction of the tunnel they ran out. Thanks to the signal enhancer he left in the chasm he could somewhat measure where the Lich was. At its current speed, it wouldn't take it long to arrive here so he needed to have his golems block it from approaching them.

While his plan was in motion he could see all of the adventurers being astonished by this mining area. Probably all of them with perhaps the half-orc excluded knew about its worth. This area was already exposed so it would probably be impossible to keep it a secret, this was even less likely after he heard the dwarven adventurer shout at him.

"Aye, he told me about ye, greedy bastard, what do ye think ye wur doin' 'ere?"

"This is not the time for arguing, we need to leave but if you want to stay here and contend with that lich by yourself, then be my guest."

Wedamir wasn't amused and Roland had a suspicion as to why. First of all, he did mention one of the union leaders by name. Dwarven adventurers treated their craftsmen a lot differently than their human counterparts. To them, the creation of weapons and armor that kept them safe was something to be praised.

The dwarves in this world also had a delusion that for some reason all mining areas should belong to them. They would buy out each and everyone that they could get their hands on. The union in particular had contracts in place that would force nobles to prioritize them over others if they so desired. Thus from Wedamir's standpoint, Roland's attempt at hiding this mining area could have been akin to denying the dwarves their birthright.

This was certainly problematic, the dwarf would probably go running to the union bastards that disliked him. They on the other hand would see this as a chance of getting back at him. They would probably try to spin it as withholding information from the guild or the nobles that the mine really belonged to by law. Luckily they didn't really have proof of him being here for long so he could always deny that he was mining the place for many months.

"Wedamir is thick headed but I don't think even he wants to contend with a tier 3 Lich but isn't this a dead end? I don't see any exit, Wayland?"

"Give me a moment."

Without giving an explanation he quickly ran up to the wall with the hidden runic symbols. While the way they operated wasn't difficult, the way they were hidden was peculiar. Without his debugging skill guiding him through the process, it would take a higher-tier runesmith to even notice that there was a locking mechanism there.

"There really was an exit..."

Lobelia cheered out as she saw a bunch of runes lighting up when Roland touched the space above the door. Following the activation a large door that was big enough to fit his large mule golem appeared.

With it now being open he ordered it to walk right back in through it. Luckily he had not even begun unpacking so it wasn't hard to just retreat.

"So that's how you've been able to do it..."

Not everyone here connected the dots when it came to this place. Lobelia on the other hand had realized that this had been discovered during the time the nobles visited this dungeon. This did bring up some questions though, was this actually discovered later by Roland or did he have some kind of deal with the nobles?

During that time no reports were made by them and the safe zone was supposed to have been destroyed when they were evacuating. This was not the time to ask about such things, they were still being chased by the monstrous Lich. Roland confirmed this fact as he had been constantly monitoring the pathway leading to the chasm.

"It's here... move now!"

He pointed to the opening while taking out a few more items from his satchel. Even though he had gone down here without expecting any problems there was still a contingency plan for if anything went wrong. First of all, four of the ten drones that he had moved inside of the tunnel.

These four specific ones had the best equipment suited for this job. It was a new model that integrated the new turret technology that he had been experimenting with. They had a technical name that Roland gave to each new iteration but in short, he called them, Sentry Golems.

Their bodies were slightly larger and their mechanical limbs were also bulkier. On top, they had a large turret that could move in a wide area. It was not omnidirectional due to the bulkier form but while aiming down limited spaces like that tunnel it was the perfect monster killer.

The robotic golems dug their spider-like limbs into the hard rocks as they waited. Two were down on the ground while the other duo was above them on the ceiling. Thanks to Roland's map they could see the enemy getting into range and when the Lich ducked out of the corner they would activate.

To supplement their escape Roland had also laid out a few traps. While they were running away he had been attaching explosives to the walls, almost all of the ones that he had were now stuck to them and would detonate the moment someone passed by them. At least that was the plan but his map was telling him otherwise.

The view was quite limited but he could see the dot that represented the Lich start to move through the pathway. The mines that were placed there and that were supposed to react to his presence didn't activate for some reason. Perhaps the Lich had some kind of skill to detect or disable the runic bombs that he placed there?

They were still only simple runic devices that would activate when someone moved in range or stepped on them. If the monster was able to evade his traps he would need to place more elaborate ones instead. His new improved bombs could be thrown from a distance just like the signal magnifying device before.

The disk shape allowed for a better throw and the flat surface could easily stick to rocks. One of these bombs made its way towards the entrance to this mining area. As it connected with the wall it started to

glow, this glow caused more rocks to appear around it for camouflage purposes. It was in short a self-hiding bomb, the earth magic runes that were there could imitate almost any terrain.

While he was preparing the second line of defense and the adventurers were going through the exit his golems finally picked up the enemy. Their golemic eyes could see the skeleton surrounded by some kind of flame barrier. Through them Roland could tell that this was indeed a Lich from that dungeon. It was also probably the one that jumped into his cannon beam.

A barrage of blue energy blasts shot out from the sentry golems. They were all enhanced mana arrows that used a similar spiral motion to drill themselves through armored opponents. Before they collided with the Lich they started to decrease in size. With the decreased magical output they were then unable to contend with the magical barrier the monster surrounded itself.

‘What is that? a mana canceling barrier? No... it should have something like that.’

Instead of canceling mana, it was doing something else. The monster was a tier 3 being and someone that had high control of magic. It was probably exerting its control over the mana being shot towards it and weakening it in the process. It was a similar effect but not as strong and had more weaknesses than outright canceling the mana particles.

The golems that he created would be great against non-magically inclined opponents. When two spell casters contended with each other most of the time the one with more mana or control over it came out victorious. The toughest part was getting through their shields that protected them from harm. Even Roland would be able to extend disperse enemy mana with his own abilities and also had some runic contingencies in place for such an occasion.

“It’s here, get in!”

“Shit are you sure about this? Can’t we just make our stand here, there are six of us and that thing is alone!”

“It won’t be alone for long, now get in.”

Armand was the last one in line of getting in. While they had the number advantage it wouldn’t be for long. Roland wasn’t sure how the blazing skeletons were getting down from that cliff but he was picking it up on the radar, they were making their way down here. Even if they could take out this monster together if the swarm of tier 2 skeletons arrived they would be done for.

There were too many variables and he could see that his magic attacks weren’t as effective. Roland didn’t have much experience against other spell casters. Usually, the spells overpowered his opponents as they weren’t very experienced with them either. He had never faced off against a mage on his own level and this Lich outranked him by a tier and also level.

The better way would be to make a tactical retreat for now and bring some tier 3 backup later. No adventurer guild would let such a strange monster roam the dungeon. They just needed to evacuate to the higher levels and wait for help. The monster would probably remain to roam this level, for the time being, at least that was what he was hoping for.

This monster was quite impatient, after the barrage coming from the golems, it charged forward as if it was maddened by something. The turrets continued to fire but they could not pierce through that

magical barrier. Soon the monster was upon them and without even bothering to properly attack the mechanical beings they just began to melt.

The monster's dark flames filled the entire area quickly corroding through the golem's system and disabling them in the process. This monster didn't stop and continued to speed up as if he was after something. That something was just around the corner and already shoving Armand into the tunnel that everyone was escaping into.

Right as the angry glowing skeleton was charging through the entrance Roland detonated the charges there. The explosion rocked the entire area and caused the rock from the ceiling to fall down. This measure was supposed to at least stall this angry-looking monster but this Lich had other plans.

"What the..."

Roland backed away as he saw a massive surge of green energy wash all over the place. It was as if some fluorescent water was being churned out from within this monster. Instead of water, it was just really thick magical energy that was used to stop the mine entrance from caving in. The blasts that he detonated didn't even manage to halt the monster's approach and now it was time for his trump card.

A beam of condensed energy traveled from a gem inside of his chest almost instantly. This was the weapon that served him well during his gold rank exam and his current stats had been enhanced further. Yet to his dismay when the beam collided with that green barrier it just couldn't go through. This creature was well equipped in defending itself against magical attacks and with everything that he threw at it, the monster swatted it back.

"Shit..."

Roland quickly ducked into the secret passage as it was closing. His last line of defense were the mining golems that tossed themselves on the monster. They had a self-detonating option and while some started shooting mana bolts the others attempted to grapple the monster's skeletal limbs.

After getting a good grip they would overload their runic battery and produce a large explosion. At least that was what they were supposed to do but instead, they found themselves being pushed back by more green energy that took on a more flame-like consistency.

Luckily even though all of his creations were shoved to the side, they still bought him enough time. The monster's empty eye sockets burst forth with angry flames as it charged at him. This was the last he saw of it as the wall slammed shut before the being could make it inside.

There he started backing away while frantically opening up the mule golem. Inside he found the improved mana cannon. Realistically speaking this was the only thing that could save him now, if the monster made it inside he would need to shoot it.

However, as he was trying to connect the cables to his own armor he noticed something. The monster had stopped in its tracks and the thumping on the wall began to decrease. This whole area was surrounded by thick rock that was somewhat resistant to magic. Even Rolland needed many hours of drilling to get anywhere within this dungeon.

This wasn't all, he felt that the moment the Lich started attacking this wall some kind of safety spell was initiated. It seemed that he wouldn't need to use this cannon, the monster couldn't get towards this

side, or at least, not before they were long gone. Thus after quickly getting up from the ground, he turned to the party of five.

“We need to go.”

Chapter 264: Time to evacuate.

It has been many days since it stepped foot in this strange location. The beings around it were weak but it still wanted to spend some time examining them. It was a stroke of luck but it found a hidden passage containing strange worm-like creatures. Their nesting ground was transformed into its lair and the bodies that continuously respawned were turned into flaming skeletal minions.

Yet what interested it more were the other beings that rarely came to this place. In contrast to the worms and other dungeon monsters the Lich encountered they varied vastly. Some were large and some were small. Their skeletal structure was different and some of the organs were also rarer than the others which made the monster divide them into groups.

A strange thing happened not soon after it left. Before it wasn't aware of it but after killing some of the dungeon creatures it had become stronger. There was no prompt or system relaying the information but the Lich certainly knew that it had leveled up. Slowly as its forces grew it was getting stronger, the feeling of making progress was intoxicating, so much that it even forgot about leaving this place for a moment.

Its strengthening drive was interrupted on this faithful day. The strange bags of flesh began to appear less and less until a group of slightly stronger ones came close to its lair. Previously it didn't even need to come out itself as its large number of minions was enough. Yet this small group proved itself somewhat stronger but not strong enough to escape.

Then a peculiar thing happened, it could feel it. The minion that it left behind in the area it first appeared had been defeated. The link to its minions became weaker but after it died the last thing it saw flashed before its eyes. It was some strange wolf-like creature that it had never seen before and behind it stood a strange armored being.

At first, it only thought it was just a new variant for it to study but it turned out to be much more. This armored being began giving out a unique mana signature that the Lich grew accustomed to, it was the same one as the beam of mana that collided with it. Could this be the source of it all? Could that armored thing be the one that gave it freedom?

It was momentarily stunned as it just continued to focus its mana sense down into the chasm. A light show ensued soon after and the five creatures its minions were contending with did something strange, they jumped down. Did they give up on their lives, it didn't seem so as they had managed to survive.

This was a chance for the Lich, it needed to find who that person was. It descended down the hole it had previously come out of with the help of the lesser levitation spell. Slowly but surely it arrived at the tunnel and there it could feel the mana pattern it had grown accustomed to.

A strange feeling went through its empty head, the answers that it was looking for could be around the corner. There was a problem, the armored being that was using the strange mana pattern was moving away. Was it aware of its presence and decided to flee?

The Lich grew angry, how could the thing that awoke it deny it? Why would it be unwilling to give it the answers it desired? It wanted to know what this world was and no one would stand in its way of discovering the truth. Without hesitating anymore it stepped forward, quickly it would capture the one that set it free to examine it thoroughly.

Its approach was met by the blue arachnids from before. Their form was slightly different but the spells they produced were similar to the ones it knew. With how much it had studied the mana pattern it was quite easy to disperse the particles before they collided with its own shield made of corrupt energy.

The Lich wanted to stop and examine these spider golems but there was a bigger prize before him. Why should he settle for these empty shells if their creator wasn't far away from them? It continued to charge while absorbing all the magical explosions that didn't cause a single point of health to drop.

Finally, it arrived at the mining area to only be confronted by a large energy blast. This one was more similar to the beam that continuously invaded its previous home. It troubled it a bit more but as with all the previous attacks, it was unable to get through its magical defenses. To the Lich's dismay, a problem arose as the answers it was looking for disappeared behind a secret wall that it was unaware of.

How could it have known that there was another way out of this place? Did the being with the unique mana pattern plan all of this? Was it watching from outside just to mock it? The Lich exploded in anger and charged at the closed passage. Before getting to it, the passage was closed.

This reminded it of the past when it was unable to leave through the hidden opening. Even when it continued to slam its fists and spells on this wall, the damage wasn't enough to get it through. Some kind of defensive mechanism had been triggered to imbue the rocks with the dungeon's mana. It was getting through it but the time it would require would be tremendous.

The unique mana pattern and the being that had it vanished from its mana sense. It could not peer through this wall but it couldn't just give up. What if the armored thing inside was just waiting for it to leave? It needed to continue and get through it but this was not enough. The Lich now knew that there was a possibility of hidden entrances and exits. It was possible for his target to flee while it was spending all of its time here.

For the time being it needed to leave this place but the armored being could appear again. Luckily one of its skills that it had learned after leveling up had just gone off cooldown. Without waiting for another second it pointed out with its staff at an empty area in this mine. There strange green occult symbols started appearing followed by a skeletal shape.

This skill drained a lot of mana reserves but it was something worthwhile. After a minute a skeletal monster appeared without needing a body like the lesser ones. This one was much taller than the rest and its bones were black as obsidian. The horns and animalistic mouth with sharp teeth clearly distinguished it from the others. This superior undead would guard this place while it tended to other things.

With this out of the way the Lich quickly made its way back up the chasm. It had burned through a lot of mana by summoning the superior undead monster but still managed to get back to the original lair.

As it stepped down onto the ledge it was greeted by the mostly mindless minions. The skeletal soldiers spread apart as their master walked toward the hidden lair opening. With a wave of its bone staff, it canceled the illusory spell that no one was able to detect.

This opening had been smaller at the beginning, normally only a large worm could get through. Now on the other hand it was spacious enough for several skeletal warriors to squeeze in without a problem. The Lich's eyes glowed green once more as it started into the huge open space. There as if waiting for his call a swarm of red glowing eyes followed suit.

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"How long have you been hiding this place? Hey, does the city Lord know about this... wait, was it his idea?"

"You're asking a lot of questions, now isn't really the time..."

"Well, sorry for asking so many questions, I've just almost died to a tier 3 Lich with a small battalion of skeleton warriors, then I find you sneaking around here..."

"Aye, Ah bet he had something to do with it!"

"Wedamir, I know that you dislike Wayland but I don't think that he would be wandering around here if he knew that there was a Lich roaming around."

Lobelia replied to the angry dwarf that was following behind her. Some time had passed since they escaped into these tunnels. At the moment they were in a large empty chamber that looked like a place fit for a boss. Roland that was guiding them here didn't say much and only continued to say that they needed to get out first.

He was trying to wrap his head around the thing he had done. The Lich out there was running loose and was clearly not acting like a monster from a dungeon. It was more in line with the free monsters that roamed outside of dungeons. Roland didn't have enough time to use his analyzing skill but he wouldn't be surprised if the Lich's level was higher than before.

While the other continued to ask him questions about this place his mind was elsewhere. Somehow he had to come to terms with his blunder and that he was probably responsible for releasing that monster. Perhaps he couldn't be totally sure if he was the only reason but all hints pointed his way. If it was true and all of it was his fault then the lives of the people that died to the Lich would be on his conscience.

'Was I being too greedy?'

"Hey, Wayland, what's wrong with you?"

"Huh?"

Finally, he turned back toward the five other people that were with him. Lobelia was the one that shouted at him and was about to open the boss's chamber door and go outside. All of them were looking at him with varied expressions. Armand as always looked ticked off and the dwarf continuously was on his case.

'I guess this isn't the time for self-pity.'

After giving out a sigh he had to rethink this whole scenario. He could not change the past and needed to live with the actions that he took. While people had died due to the Lich, it was still possible to save others. The monster was stuck before the secret entrance and perhaps this was enough time to evacuate.

Roland had been spending some time in this Dungeon and even more down in these secret tunnels. It was easy for him to right the entire place with his detection devices. When the monster finally broke down the wall he would know. Its area of operations also connected to the lava lake that he had outfitted with the same map enhancers.

“Ah sorry, I spaced out for a moment. We need to leave and inform the other adventurers about the Lich.”

“I agree, only a team of platinum adventurers can handle it, we need to evacuate as soon as we can.”

Jasmine the archer adventurer that was with them nodded at Roland. Lobelia and Armand as well as Korgak were people that he already knew, the only person that needed convincing was the dwarf. Luckily he just gave out a grunt before trekking behind the group that was moving towards the exit.

“Don’t think this is th’ end o’ this, ye will have to explain yersel’ tae th’ guild later.”

Roland had thought of the possibility of bribing everyone here to downplay his involvement but the dwarf was the most problematic. It probably wouldn’t be possible to change his mind even if he dangled coin or even superior magical equipment in front of him. Wedamir apparently had ties to the union and those guys hated him. This would really be a troublesome situation that he might not be able to weasel out of.

“So what, he was mining a bit in the dungeon? Give it a rest and move on.”

At least Lobelia was on his side as she delivered a small nudge with her foot to Wedamir’s behind. The way towards the lava lake area was already cleared up as he had not even been here for a day. Within a few hours, the monsters would not respawn so they could quickly get through the winding corridors to the space under the lake.

“So that’s how you did it...”

“Let’s go, we don’t have much time before the lava floods the lake again.”

Soon the party of now six adventurers and a ruby wolf popped their heads out the exit. There they saw the middle of the lava lake that had just subsided to the sides. They had enough time to get out and found themselves on the side closer to the exit.

“Okay shit, what do we do now?”

“I’m the fastest here, I’ll go ahead and inform the guild, we might have to lock down the dungeon.”

“Lock down the dungeon?”

Armand asked Lobelia that was about to sprint towards the exit. To them, this all looked like a unique rare monster spawn that was on the level of a floor boss. It was unknown to them if this Lich could leave the lower level but there were cases where it happened. Only Roland was somewhat aware of the whole

picture. Yet even he didn't know how this Lich operated, if it came from another dungeon it might also be stuck in this one, there was no real way of him knowing until the monster took a step outside of it.

"If it's a tier 3 monster that can roam this place freely then it will kill everyone, there are also non-combatants here."

"Damn, th' miners!"

Wedamir was the one to shout out now as he remembered that the union had placed some mining camps here. The hidden area that Roland found was not the only reusable mining spot in this dungeon. All the other ones that had been found were being used by the union or people affiliated with them. This sent Wedamir into somewhat of a panic as one encampment was on the other side of the lake that was closing itself.

"Hey, what are you doing? Get back here, hey Armand give me a hand."

Lobelia along with Armand had to pull the dwarf away as he was about to attempt a run through the molten lake that was going to close itself. The next cycle of opening would be in fifteen minutes which Roland already knew. While he had no love for the union and would actually love to see their mines being destroyed the people working there didn't deserve this.

"The lava will open up again in fifteen minutes but I'm not sure that going over there is such a good idea."

"He is right, that path around the chasm will bring those skeletons there, what if that Lich is with them?"

"Ah dun care, ah will hulp mah brothers!"

While the others were fighting he decided to do something about this problem that probably arose due to him. Even though the Lich could be anywhere he felt that in this wide open area he would have enough time to retreat. The monster wasn't actually that fast as most of its physical attributes weren't that high. It was a being that was poised in mana and not running.

There was no use running around and trying to inform the adventurers about the danger. Most of them would probably not believe it unless they saw the monster before them. Instead, he decided to go with a different method that would alert everyone to it at once. This method would make a big ruckus but that would just prove its validity to people.

The large mule golem was still there and within it was all of Roland's equipment. He had already developed a sound system within his workshop and could create runes that worked like speakers. It wouldn't be hard to produce a sound system here with the help of his rune duplication skill that would instantly place what he wanted on a piece of metal.

Not all of his spider golems were destroyed during his escape. These two and a stationary device that he would place here would have to be enough. While everything was happening the other adventurers did seem confused.

"Wayland, what are you doing, there is no time for this..."

"I know, but before we go we have to inform the adventurers about the danger, I will stay here you all should evacuate."

The others looked at Roland who continued to fiddle around with magical equipment. He pulled out metal parts that somehow connected to each other and even the golems that they saw before started to be modified. What he was doing was a mystery to them as they thought that the best thing to do was to get out of here. The other adventures that roamed this dungeon had to take care of themselves, this was their life and they had to be ready for everything.

“How will you do that? Come on, let’s go!”

Lobelia shouted but instead of Roland replying he took out another strange-looking device that he moved towards his mouth.

“Testing... one two three...”