

Runesmith 267

Chapter 267: Obsidian soldiers.

Summoning existed in this world, it was a separate field from elemental magic that was considered extremely strong in the right hands. Like any other school of magic, there were variations in the techniques used. One subsection utilized ritualistic ceremonies with offerings to the being it wanted to procure. Other ones were dedicated by simple class skills, contracts, and occult sacrifices.

One thing united all of those types of summoning practices: the creature that appeared always required something for their services. It could be something simple as the magic caster's mana or something darker like a part of their soul. This was one of the reasons why demonic magicians were so feared as they could offer up other people as sacrifices to gain a fast boost to their power.

Demons weren't very particular about who they were getting their part of the deal from. If a demon summoner rounded up a village of people and performed the desired ritual the monster would oblige. A contract between the summoned creature and the summoner would be formed. After the contractor just needed their mana to jolt their contracted being over to this world.

A lot of things depended on the type of contract. The summoned creature could constantly siphon mana from its user while it was on this side or just take a bulk cut at the beginning. The first type could potentially put the contracted being into an almost permanent summoning. The caster just needed to have enough mana regeneration to offset the amount being used. It was somewhat similar to the buffing runes that Roland used in his armor which took a fixed amount of mana.

Thus he asked himself this question, what was the type of summoning that the Lich was using? Did it offer up the flesh of the monsters and people it killed to get it here or was it just offering it mana? Did the black-boned skeletons have a time limit or did the Lich need to spend his own magic to prolong the stay here?

'There are always rare summoning skills that don't cost anything and are on a timer...'

That one was the worst-case scenario. A person could just use a timed skill to summon monsters with almost no penalties. Most of the time such skills had a limit on the creatures that were summoned. The high-tier undead summon had flown away with its master but it wasn't the only one there. Just as those two vanished into the horizon another one appeared before them.

"Hey Wayland, stop spacing out, think we might need some of that magic over here..."

Roland had to turn his head towards Armand that was shouting. While the injured Lich made his escape another problem arose. The army of lower level tier 2 skeletons continued to attack but they were getting dispatched by the adventurers and guards that made it safely from the other side. Normally this would be a great chance to set up a barrier while the miners fled.

To everyone's surprise, not one but two strange-looking undead appeared before them. The one in the front was a lot larger than the rest. Just like the obsidian gargoyle that escaped with the Lich the two had charred black bones.

Obsidian Skeleton Beast Soldier [Summoned] L 150

Obsidian Skeleton High-Mage [Summoned] L 150

He could see their names and levels, it seemed that their levels were all uniform. This was probably the limit of the skill their master was using. The Beast Soldier's body was around four meters tall. It had long limbs and claw-like hands with a skeletal structure similar to that of a gorilla. The head looked similar to that of a stag with sharper teeth than usual.

The other one wasn't much bigger than the other regular blazing skeletons. Its face was similar to the other one as the antlers were poking out of the pitch black robe it was wearing. In its right hand, it was holding a staff that radiated green flames just like the ones its master flung around.

It was clear that the larger one was the close-quarters combatant while the mage would be delivering support spells from the back. With the addition of so many foot soldiers, it would be quite a hard nut to crack. Without giving anyone any time to prepare a strange wail escaped from the larger skeleton.

"Shit..."

His ears were on fire as he was hit with the sound attack. It was a wide-range disabling attack that caught all the adventurers off guard. Even Armand and Wedamir that were high-level tier 2 warriors, could not resist it. They went down to their knees while clutching their ears. Luckily for them, they had a member in their party that had prepared for this type of occasion.

Roland's armor initiated an automated defense spell that canceled out the sound from reaching his ears. He needed to work fast as the Skeleton Beast Soldier continued to howl while his ally pointed his staff made of bones up. The skull at the end of it started to give up a green glow through its empty eye sockets. This concluded with a large sphere of green fire forming above the spot it was pointing at.

This forced Roland to quickly abandon the smoking cannon that he used to injure the Lich. Instead, he grabbed his own elongated kite shield. It had the length of a regular tower shield but was narrower at the bottom. With it in his hand, he jumped towards his allies that were holding their heads together. Even when trying they were not able to shake off the stunning effect.

When he arrived before them there was not much time. The only reason he was able to activate the shield's defensive spells was due to it being a runic item. The skeletal mage was still forced to chant out the spell that looked like a giant ball of green flames. Without help from others, mages like these could not utilize grand spells to their full potential. Yet during times of war, there was no greater weapon than a battalion of mages flinging powerful destructive spells.

Finally, the ball of green flames was flung forward by the monster. It collided with multiple layers of shields that Roland set up in a hurry. The first one shattered almost instantly and the second one took only half a second to burst as well. Only when the spell arrived at the last one did it stop in its tracks before exploding.

Even when his spells managed to block most of the damage he could feel his health dropping. Armand and Wedamir that were behind him tumbled away but were mostly fine but this was not the end. The skeletal mage raised his staff up again and was already preparing to cast another spell. His ally on the other hand was luckily out of breath and the stunning effect of his shout wore off.

"We need to retreat!"

“You don’t have to tell me twice!”

“Aye...”

The three men were of the same mind. There was no way of them winning this and the miners had been evacuating for a while. After dropping their tools earlier they had made some space between the main skeletal forces. Only a few adventurers had stayed behind as they thought that handling the lower tier 2 skeleton soldiers wouldn’t be that hard. No one expected two tier 3 monsters to quickly appear out of the blue.

‘The monster is clearly a tier 3 but the spell it used was somewhat on the weaker side...’

Roland came to this conclusion after standing up. Normally he shouldn’t be able to take something like that with this little prep. He expected the last magical spell to burst before activating his armor's defensive mechanism to ride the shockwave. Instead, his shield was able to last through it by just burning copious amounts of mana instead.

This was probably a limit of the High-Mage class that this monster had. The spells weren’t quite at the tier 3 level. Perhaps the initial level of hundred fifty and his own raised stats put him somewhat around these two creatures' level. Yet he was just one man and didn’t think he could handle both of them alone, not even if Agni or the adventurers helped out it wouldn't change much. Escaping was still the most sensible conclusion and for that, he at least needed to shake these two off.

“Hey, keep them back from me for a second.”

“Huh?”

Wedamir was startled as Roland threw the shield at him. Even though the two obsidian undead were the main problem there was still a swarm of the blazing skeletons to tackle. After a quick glance towards Armand that nodded to the dwarf, the two put themselves between the charging monsters while Roland looked up.

This area was vast but they were still underground. The ceiling above them was filled with stalactites formed from hard rock. Normally no one would be stupid enough to attempt blowing up the ceiling but all of them were in a life and death situation. There was a nice row of pointy rocks right above the black skeletal mage.

The other larger monster was keeping a close watch on the caster. It seemed as if these two were ordered to stick together. The large one would perhaps stun and bat away any people trying to get close to the mage while it used the wide-area spells to kill everyone around them.

Thus while Armand and his new dwarven friend were distracting the skeletons that got through the puddles he grabbed the rest of his throwable discs. These were quickly flung up into the air. With the help of his throwing skill and their self-sticking properties, they made their way up to the ceiling.

To top it all off he also grabbed his hammer staff with both hands. His aim was to deliver as much force and have the whole place cave in on the monsters. The mage could see what he was doing and so did the larger skeleton. It didn’t seem that these two were intelligent enough to see through the tactic as they remained at their spot. The ball of flame continued to expand but it would not be thrown again.

Right before the mage could point the spell towards the group of adventurers a huge explosion rocked the entire place. As the bombs exploded a burst of mana escaped from Roland's own weapon. It was a chaotic orb of energy that after colliding with the ceiling continued to drill itself in further while sending off smaller shockwaves. These caused quite a mess and produced a smokescreen.

"Retreat!"

Shouted Roland as the spell connected with the desired spot.

"Woah!"

Armand shouted back while glancing up towards the destruction. No one really needed to hear the retreat order as they booked it for the hills. The whole upper area of the dungeon quickly came crashing down. This was coupled with lava, ash, and debris that made their way toward the skeletal forces and their two commanding officers.

Roland was running as well but his gaze was pointed in another direction. There he locked eyes with the mule golem that started moving in the opposite direction of the fleeing people. It pained him to do this but he wanted to have a secondary plan that would guarantee their escape. For this reason, he needed to sacrifice one of his creations.

The only thing that he rushed in for was the cannon that he discarded after the blast. This thing could still be used so after grabbing it he started running. Agni was right next to his master, when one of the weaker skeletons approached he was quickly dispatched by an angry dire wolf. The bones that these monsters were made of could not handle even one bite. "Hey, move it if you don't want to die."

To Roland's surprise, Armand did not abandon him. Instead, he remained close by and just waited, perhaps the man was not as bad as he previously thought. While he had a drinking problem and was focused on carnal pleasures he did keep him company during this crisis. Soon the two were both running while the obsidian skeletons were covered in rubble.

Yet while the white skeletal minions started getting crushed under all the falling rock the two troublesome ones weren't. The mage produced a shield of green flames that was similar to its masters. It didn't have quite the same output but was enough to protect it from the falling rocks. The soldier type with the head of a stag didn't even move, the rocks that collided with its thick bones just bounced back as if it was just a minor inconvenience.

The whole area became flooded with dust and rock. From within this cloud of ash, the larger black skeleton burst forth. Its jump was tremendous as it almost fully avoided the blasting zone with just two strides. After giving out another loud howl it started picking up speed and running after the escaping adventurers.

Leaving the mage to its own devices was something that Roland calculated into his secondary plan which was slowly moving towards the monster. This was the mule golem's last hoorah, its whole outer shell was producing glowing runes that were digging into the bulky chassis. This magical phenomenon pulled the monster in as it charged at the golem with the intention of killing it.

The last Obsidian Skeleton Beast Soldier jumped up while stretching out its long limbs over its head. Its intent was to slam those large fists of it on the slow-moving golem before chasing after the others. This

was of course a trap, the moment those hands collided with the mule's glowing shell another explosion rocked the entire area.

This one was on the same level as the one in the middle of the lake but much brighter. The black figure of the monster was fully swallowed up by the bright light. The adventurers that felt the surge of mana taking over could not help but look back. There they could see an armored man sprinting towards them who was not looking back at the explosion he produced.

Over his shoulder, he was carrying a huge cannon but it didn't seem to be weighing him down at all. Without saying anything Roland caught up to Armand that instantly followed suit. Everyone was in full evacuation mode and quickly they caught up to the miners that weren't boosted as much as the combat class holders.

'This should give us some time...'

Roland started slowing down as his group reached the miners. Other people started crowding in from the sides. It was clear that the message had gone through and everyone was on board with the evacuation effort. Some adventurers had even formed a defensive line to block any potential monsters. Others were moving forward to battle the creatures on the upper levels which were also a potential risk.

You have gained 1000 experience points.

The system message rang in his head indicating that he had defeated a weak monster. Normally he wouldn't be interested in it as similar ones had ringed in his head but each one had given him ten experience points. Reanimated skeleton soldiers gave considerably fewer points for killing them.

Perhaps this thousand came from one of the black summoned creatures that would also give a diminished amount of experience. It seemed that something had put in place a barrier for grinding. It would not allow people to farm summoned creatures that could be easily replaced by mana or resources.

While the explosion proved that the summoned monsters could be killed by his creations it didn't fix the problem. The Lich could probably create more of those soldiers and they could even work with each other. Even though their tactics were crude they would still make things harder for anyone facing them. With a lack of a proper platinum rank party, this dungeon was a lost cause, and perhaps the swarm of skeletal soldiers that they faced was only the tip of the iceberg.

Where the Lich took off was a mystery to everyone but with the flight capabilities of that gargoyle, it could have made its way to ledges people would not be able to reach. It would not be that simple to find the injured monster and he was not in a state to hunt something like it down alone. His only option was to return home and prepare for the worst but as he was evaluating his choices he heard a characteristic rattling of bones coming from the area they just fled from.

Chapter 268: News spreads.

"Ugh...Damn, my head is killing me, I should have not gone with that girl..."

"Did you do it again? Didn't I tell you to stay away from those flowery district girls, there are nothing but trouble."

“Don’t be like that, I couldn’t refuse to get those drinks when she asked so nicely... speaking of which...”

“Don’t tell me... you want to borrow more money.”

“Just a tiny bit.”

“We just got our wages a few days ago, how are you already broke?”

“Well, you know how it is...”

“No, I really don’t!”

Two guards at the entrance of the Albrook city dungeon started arguing over some petty issues. It was early in the morning and their work day had only begun. One of the two was quite chatty and continued retelling his escapades from last night. The men were tasked to guard this dungeon entrance but nothing ever happened that warranted their attention.

Their only real task was to look at everyone's adventurer card before letting them pass inside. While sometimes some young men tried to sneak in without one it wouldn't really affect them. If someone died to the monsters on the inside then it was their fault they were only there to minimize the damage if they spotted something.

Just like any other day this one was turning out to be a snooze fest. Both of them didn't even look at the cards correctly while continuing to chat. Suddenly however they heard someone shouting from within the entrance.

“Make way!”

It was an elven woman that was running quite fast. The two guards had a knack for spotting beauties and this gold rank elf was quickly becoming one of the fan favorites. The first thing that they spotted was that she was quite sweaty, it dawned on them that she had to have been running for a while. What could have caused a gold rank adventurer to be like this? Even in the lower levels, there weren't that many monsters that reached over level one hundred, something had to be wrong.

“Hey, watch it!”

A few of the Steel rank adventurers quickly ducked to the side while some almost tumbled down the stairs as the golden-haired woman ran past them. She did not say anything as she just zig-zagged between people that were trying to clock in for their morning grind. Everyone was left annoyed and some even said a few chosen words at the runaway woman.

The two guards wanted to ask what was wrong but it wasn't really in their job description. Probably someone had died down in the dungeon and a rescue party needed to be formed. Something like this happened on a weekly basis, there were large numbers of Bronze and Steel rank adventurers never returning.

People sometimes forgot that the monsters inside could easily overwhelm them if they didn't pay attention. The upper levels weren't as vast as the lower ones but it was also easy to get lost. After maps were made the death toll decreased but some newbies continued to die without seeing worth in spending money on pricey help items.

“What’s up with her?”

“Beats me, you know those gold ranks, they really want to reach that next rank.”

“That’s true.”

The guards laughed as in most cases the in-between ranks were the most dangerous. Many adventurers would put themselves in danger while trying to gain those higher-tier rewards. A lot of Steel and Gold ranks had fallen due to pushing themselves too hard and too soon.

Yet after the young woman vanished into the horizon a peculiar thing happened. Around thirty minutes later another adventurer arrived, one of the silver grade variety. Just as the half-elven woman before the man was quick to run up the stairs to dash into the distance. Soon after more and more adventurers came pouring out which indicated that something was afoot.

“What’s happening?”

“Hey! Why are you running, what happened?”

Finally, after several people had gone through the entrance one of the guards grabbed a man by the shoulder. The person recoiled in fright as if there was something wrong that spooked the guard. What could have happened to garner this type of reaction, was some kind of strong monster loose in the dungeon? If it was, it shouldn't be able to get to these higher levels and the safe zone that was at the entrance.

“A... a Lich has appeared! Now leave me be.”

The man wrestled out of the grip and quickly took off with all the other adventurers that started to flood out from the inside. Some of them were screaming, telling the tales of strange skeletal monsters appearing in the lower regions. But the scariest bit wasn't that they were undead, no it was that they could enter the upper levels of the dungeon.

“A Lich? Hey, aren't those things considered really dangerous?”

“Yeah, don't you need a high-level priest to kill one of them? Didn't they need a battalion of knights to kill the one that appeared on the mainland?”

“I think so...but that one was a free Lich and it took over a whole village, this one is in a dungeon so it shouldn't be that bad... right?”

The two guards looked at each other with fear in their eyes. Why was everyone running away, could the Lich get out here and get to them? That should not be possible, monsters from a dungeon should not be able to escape. There was only one instance where that could occur and it was not something anyone had an answer for yet, a dungeon break...

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“Huh, so you're telling me that it was a tier 3 Lich all along?”

“Yes, you need to contact platinum adventurers or get that Valerian asshole to penny up some knights! Time is running out, Armand and Wayland are still in there.”

“Hey calm down, you can’t just go insulting the nobles if they catch you doing it they’ll flog you in public.”

“I don’t care, we have to do something how about we get those guys from the golden order, aren’t they around here somewhere fighting with that cult? Aren’t Liches something they swore to eradicate?”

A rather angry-looking Lobelia was shouting at a grumpy-looking bald man. To the side stood a beautiful-looking elf lady that had just closed the door behind Lobelia that had rushed in during the morning meeting. It was clear that there was a problem but the two guild members here didn’t truly believe that it was as dire as the half-elf painted it to be.

“Lassie, you can’t expect me to call the Solarian church for unconfirmed news.”

“But I’m confirming it now!”

Lobelia stomped her foot down on the ground while almost kicking the large desk behind which the guild master was sitting. While he didn’t want to jump to conclusions he could not just ignore the claim that a tier 3 Lich was loose in the dungeon. Apparently, the person that delivered the news already caused some havoc and would cause monetary losses if the claim was faulty.

“Solana.”

“I’ll contact the other guilds, guild master.”

Aurdhan nodded at the quick reply from his assistant. While the claim needed to be authenticated by more people it could not just be ignored. If what Lobelia was telling was true then the dungeon would need to come to a stop. The guild master was not quite that perturbed about the safety of the adventurers though, the bigger loss would be the amount of money the guild would lose.

The dungeons around the kingdom were bonafide gold mines. They could be used to farm various materials and even experience. It was a free training facility for the kingdom’s citizens that they didn’t need to pay for with their own taxes. A Lich subjugation could set them back by weeks or even months if there was nothing done.

He had sent the group there himself but never expected a Lich to be a problem. If this wasn’t taken care of instantly then perhaps it would set him back by more than a few months. What if this was some kind of recurring thing, he could not expect tier 2 adventurers to hang out in a hazardous dungeon like this nor would the tier 3 wait to kill a Lich that could appear at random intervals.

“Hey are you listening, we need to get Armand out of there!”

“I heard ya already, stop screaming in my ear and get out!”

“Hey, you can’t just...”

“Yes, I can. I’m the guild master, go cool down your head before I throw you out the window.”

The guild master slammed his large palm down onto the desk which caused the whole room to shake. Lobelia narrowed her eyes at the man that was more than twice her size. At first, she was going to say a few chosen words but the intimidation factor was there.

Instead, she just scoffed at the bald man before rushing out of his office, her destination would be the dungeon yet again where Armand had stayed behind. She had been against Wayland staying and even more, after her brother decided to stay as a bodyguard. Now two of the people that were close to her could be in danger and she saw that relying on the guild might have been a bad decision.

“Well? What are you waiting for?”

Solana nodded as she looked at the angry-looking guild master. She knew that it was better to have the man cool down before asking for anything. After leaving she headed out towards the communication device that their guild had. It was the usual crystal ball that could be used by their sole mage that was on their payroll. This person spent most of their time at a hidden-away magic shop which could prolong the call for help further.

As the elven lady left the guild master rose from his seat to go towards the window. There he had a good view of the training area that was becoming loud. It seemed that Lobelia had gone there and was already informing everyone about the strange happening in the dungeon.

“A tier 3 Lich huh?”

While listening to the commotion the large man looked to the nearby wall where a large axe was pinned to. This weapon seemed to bring back some old memories that the man wanted to be left forgotten. However, with a crisis at hand, his palm started reaching for this relic of the past.

“Let's not get hasty... there is still time, how about I let the young ones take care of it...”

After stopping himself he moved towards his own personal communication crystal ball. This one was a bit different and didn't require a separate mage to dial the number he required.

“I should probably give that noble brat a heads up first, he is responsible for this city, it will be interesting how he handles it.”

The leader of the city needed to be informed about this predicament. Arthur Valerian had a big stake in the dungeon that was almost the lifeblood of this city. He didn't expect much from the young upstart but it might have been interesting to see what the young man did. Luckily as a noble Arthur also had a crystal ball in his possession which would make the whole process a lot faster.

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“How many of these fuckers are there?”

“More than we kin handle at th' moment.”

“Hey Wayland, you wouldn't have any more of those exploding things on you, would you?”

“No.”

Roland answered while looking around at the landscape filled with white skeletal warriors. The group had retreated all the way to the lower level's entrance. The only reason he remained was that he felt bad for releasing the Lich into the dungeon. Now that there was no one else that he could rescue it was time for him to evacuate.

For some reason, Wedamir had decided to remain here. Perhaps he was feeling more cooperative after seeing Roland help the miners or maybe it was due to the magic shield he was lent. Dwarves liked their magical trinkets and saw people that could make them commendable.

“Hey wait a minute, I thought you had a plan can’t you blow them up like the other ones?”

“My mana isn’t infinite...”

Roland frowned at Armand who was asking for a bit too much here. In the first place, he didn’t ask for any of them to be here. In actuality, he felt that he would be better off alone. The two warriors did help some but they were a liability during the escape. His original plan was just to remain and stall long enough for everyone to get away. Then after it was done he could escape into one of the many secret tunnels that the skeletons couldn’t go into.

‘I guess I’ll have to take these two with me, Armand is one thing but I can’t really trust that dwarf...’

“Fine, after I give the signal just start running and don’t look back, they are coming.”

What he saw was hundreds of skeletal warriors that continued to pile in from afar. The number was truly staggering, where the Lich hid this many minions was the true mystery. Even when some fell another two replaced them instantly. Perhaps after getting injured by his cannon he became maddened. It wasn’t strange for a Lich to surround itself with skeletons when its life was threatened.

The only strange occurrence was this fast expansion of soldiers. The monster shouldn’t possess this much mana. Even though the skeletons didn’t require constant upkeep the reanimation spell it used should burn through a lot of magic points. Either the monster had a really deep pool of mana that even dwarfed his own or it was using something to restore its mana.

This mystery would need to wait though as in the distance a black figure emerged with green flames coming from its eyes. The skeletal high-mage had returned but it was now alone. This meant that the bestial type that was with it had been the one destroyed during the explosion.

It was not the time to fight again though, what he needed to do was to get out of this dungeon. The worst-case scenario had not yet become reality and perhaps everything could be eventually resolved. Just like before when facing a large force of monsters he used his hammer staff to produce the usual homing spell. As the orb of blue light reached a high enough altitude it burst into many smaller homing mana arrows that collided with the skeletal beings.

This was the sign and all three of them began to retreat into the open boss room. Before leaving this place Roland had to at least confirm one thing. Most of the closest undead monsters had been struck by his previous attack. One that was closest to them remained undamaged and it continued chasing after them all the way towards the boss room. Roland’s heart sank as he saw the monster going into the boss room. This was not something that should be possible within a dungeon. Boss rooms like this were somewhat secret grounds and the normal monsters should not be able to get into them. Not even rare spawns or unique ones should be able to get through it.

This partially confirmed one of his biggest fears, the Lich had become a free monster and could actually freely leave this place. With no natural enemies on the inside, it could continuously pump out skeletal

monsters. Soon the lower levels would be overrun and then the undead army could charge out toward the city.

If that would actually happen remained to be seen. The vast amount of skeletons here was scary but they were still mindless drones. The Lich had been injured so theoretically it would try to protect itself and bunker up. Instead of spreading itself thin it should normally recall its forces and set up a lair that would give the adventurers time to create a counter strikeforce.

Just as he had expected, the lone skeleton and a few others that made it through the last barrage continued inside of the boss room and continued to chase them past it. The way towards the upper levels was now clear as the other fleeing people would have probably dealt with the low-level creatures. After confirming that the undead could also leave the boss chamber a quick magic spell to the head was all it took to disable them.

“Hey... can you hear that?”

Armand called out while glancing at the entrance to the boss chamber. Roland glanced at his map which showed him a huge number of circles pushing into the empty room. The chase was on and with a quick stomp, he produced a temporary barrier of rocks. It wouldn't hold the monsters for long but it would give them time to run.

“We need to go, follow me!”