

## Runesmith 269

### Chapter 269: Troublesome thoughts.

“Ah, Shit! Why are there so many of them, where were they hiding?... Hey, where the hell are you going, that’s not the way to the exit!”

Armand shouted from behind Roland that for some reason was a lot faster than both of the warriors. Wedamir had it the worst as due to his shorter legs and shield warrior class his agility stat was the lowest of them all.

All of them had already left the boss chamber and even though not many monsters remained from the front there was a swarm of angry skeletons following after them. The upper levels were akin to a maze with many winding corridors that weren’t that great for running. From time to time they would encounter a monster waiting for them which slowed down their escape.

When looking back at the two people behind, his mouth started to angle a bit down. If he was alone then it wouldn’t have been a problem but Wedamir was falling behind. There was a lot more dungeon to go through and some sections were filled with traps. They had stayed behind for longer to let the miners and weaker adventurers escape but this could end up in them being overrun.

For a moment Roland’s mind went to a dark place. It wouldn’t be that hard to just abandon the dwarf here, Armand might even agree with him considering the history with the union. This would perhaps keep the information of the secret mine from reaching the other dwarves in the city. Jasmine, the other adventurer that he didn’t know, would probably report it to the guild master but that person might still be on his side.

It wouldn’t even be that hard to do it, one well-placed spell could cause the dwarf to trip and be quickly overrun by skeleton soldiers. Armand who didn’t have a mana sense or any detection abilities related to it would not be able to tell that it was Roland. To him, it would look like an unfortunate trap being activated. Then even if he figured it out, the possibility of Armand taking his side in the whole debacle wasn’t that low.

Where he was leading them to was a detour to one of the secret passages. It went through a section of the dungeon that wasn’t that easy to get through. It wouldn’t be that hard to cause a commotion where the dwarf lost his footing and wasn’t able to follow them. However he hesitated, it wasn’t really in him to go through something like this.

This thought of committing murder quickly faded away. Getting rid of others that weren’t involved just to save his own skin wasn’t something he was able to do. Enough people had already died in the dungeon due to the Lich being loose. What the dwarven union did after this whole debacle was over had to wait. Everything depended on Arthur and not them as the young noble was the person they all answered to.

“Pick up the pace, there is a path that leads outside here, just trust me.”

“AWooo!”

Armand didn’t answer but just continued to run after Roland and Agni that were in front. The armor that he was wearing started glowing and the runes on top of it produced a magical effect. An increase in

speed was noticed as he continued to sprint through a large corridor. Normally something like this would have been a dangerous feat, the whole place was filled with traps and avoided by everyone.

It didn't seem that Roland cared for this as he didn't bother to avoid the tiles that activated the traps. There was a set pattern to everything that changed depending on the hour. There was no time to figure this out so instead, he decided to just book it. The moment he tripped one of the traps a poison arrow shot at him from the side. This sharp projectile collided with the red shield made of fire and was bounced back instantly.

This continued to happen as he ran through the middle. A vast number of poisonous arrows continued to fly at him but with the help of his magical defenses, they weren't able to harm him at all. The fire element caused the harmful poison to evaporate and the mana shield on top of that deflected the projectiles before they could connect with the metallic armor.

Both Armand and Wedamir were surprised by the method that he used but knew that if they followed right after him they wouldn't set off any of the traps. The path was straight through the middle which didn't allow for any missteps even for the rather unwise warriors. Soon enough all of them found themselves at the end of this corridor that was behind the corner.

"Hey, didn't you say that this path led somewhere?"

"Yeah, it does, give me a second."

"What do you mean, there is nothing here but this damn wall! Do we need to destroy it?"

Armand started panicking as he almost slammed into the dead end after going around the corner. Wedamir was still further behind the two but he could also hear the commotion. Without explaining it further Roland placed his hand on a specific part of this wall. With a quick injection of his mana, a few runes lit up to quickly begin opening a secret passage.

"How did you..."

"There is no time to explain, just get in, we'll talk inside."

Armand frowned but the moment there was enough space to squeeze in he did. Wedamir finally caught up to the two and could see the secret opening. It was clear that he wanted to ask what this was all about but decided to duck in as well. Roland on the other hand remained outside for a moment.

While the wide dwarf was trying to squeeze through the tight opening he held out his large hammer. This time he didn't just aim it at the swarm of skeletons running toward them, instead, he moved it over his head to wind up. Quickly after he slammed it down on the ground to produce a destructive shockwave.

This shockwave carried an earth-based spell that turned the even ground into a rocky mess of spikes. Even though the skeletons didn't have any flesh to feel pain from the spikes, they were a lot lighter. The shift in the tunnel caused most of the ones at the front to tumble forward and it quickly cascaded into almost all of them falling over.

With a couple of other smacks now to the walls on the side, Roland produced another earthquake that would create another safety barrier before ducking into the safe room behind. When on the inside he

quickly activated the locking mechanism that slowly closed the secret door after them. Perhaps this was a bit of an overkill against the lower level skeletons but there was always a possibility of one of the obsidian ones popping up out of the woodworks.

“Whew, that was close, but where are we and why is it so dark here?”

Roland’s helmet had a function to see in the dark so he never really bothered with light spells. Skills like this also existed in the world but they were usually given to assassination and tracking classes. Armand probably had a few enhanced senses as a martial arts class holder but it was always better to see.

“Is that better?”

“Woof!”

“Wha?!”

To alleviate this problem Agni’s forehead gem which looked more like a horn now started glowing. It was a bright enough source of light to reveal everything but it also turned the scenery red. They were now in a cramped corridor that led towards a circular staircase that would bring them to a higher level. It was one of the many hidden corridors that he discovered thanks to his debugging skill.

“If we take that passage, we’ll end up on the 5th floor, let's go...”

“... So we are just going to ignore the fact that you... hey, wait up!”

Armand looked at Agni who followed behind Roland. While he could start explaining everything this wasn’t the right moment. The other two didn’t really need to know about his passage detection abilities and luckily they didn’t prod further. This was a bit surprising as he expected Wedamir to press him further like the time he discovered the secret mining area.

The walk up the long winding stairs was quite stuffy and no one muttered a word. Everyone knew that the situation was dire and they were already thinking about the next move after reaching the 5th floor. There wasn’t much to this secret corridor, no hidden traps nor any treasures; it was just a narrow passageway that brought them to their destination a lot faster.

“Another dead end?”

The moment Armand asked Roland was already looking for the opening mechanism. It didn’t take even a second for it to begin opening after the question was placed. Soon the quartet was outside and in another empty passageway. Thanks to the mapping device in his helmet and his memory Roland knew well off the fastest way of reaching the higher floors.

“Is this really the 5th floor?”

“Yes it is, if we follow this path back we’ll end up at the main fork, there if you head north you should be able to reach the main way towards the 4th floor.”

Roland explained this fact while having a slight agenda. In reality, he knew of another passage that would allow him to get out faster. The problem was Wedamir that he at least didn’t want to see the secret passageway towards his underground workshop. If word reached that he had built a tunnel

towards it without asking for permission he would be in a lot of trouble. The risk was taken to reach tier 3 faster but now it would bite him back on his behind.

“Hmph... ‘ere.”

Lucky Wedamir did have other plans and first handed the runic shield back that was lent to him. Roland grabbed it and together with his hammer staff now had a more complete set of weaponry to contend with any skeletal warriors. The group soon arrived at the fork in the road and encountered a scene.

“Hah, that was really a big shortcut...”

There were people making their way through this hub area. Some of them were adventurers that had retreated a lot earlier than they did. Meeting them up here presented how much of a cheat the hidden pathway was. This one secret of his would probably come out to light after he already guided the adventurers through not one but two of them. It wouldn’t be strange of the guild to launch a full investigation into the matter after either Jasmine or Wedamir spoke of it.

“Hey where are you going, that’s not the exit.”

“Th' miners wull come thro' 'ere, ah will hold ‘ere fur thaim, ye kin juist lea me 'ere.”

“That’s fine with me but I’m not staying here for another minute, Wayland lets just go.”

Armand just shrugged as he was clearly not interested in staying here. There was no real reason after Lobelia had already made a run for it previously. Without considering it for too long Roland decided to do that just.

“Take care and be careful.”

“Aye.”

Wedamir replied to Roland's words with a forced nod but it was still unknown what the dwarf would do with the knowledge he gained. It was not the time to worry about that yet, there were more pressing issues at hand. The skeletons could clearly run past the boss room which made it possible for them to leave the whole dungeon. With their leader injured by his cannon, it was impossible to determine what the Lich would do.

Normally the creature was supposed to barricade itself in a safe location where it surrounded itself by its minions. This Lich on the other hand was reacting like an angry child to the attack. It was throwing all of its minions at the problem at hand and perhaps hoping that something would stick. How deadly of an attack this would be depended on the number of skeletal soldiers it had produced and as it stood now the number was vast.

“Do you have any other shortcuts, Wayland?”

“As a matter of fact... follow me.”

Soon both of them separated from the dwarf and made their way to the top. While this was happening in the underground area that was covered by lava another scene was playing out...

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It didn't understand what had happened, the Lich replayed the scene in its bony head. The source of the mana, the beam of light was there and it should have been able to control that power. It had observed that energy pattern many times and even taken a direct hit to get rid of the pesky voice in its head.

There should not be a problem to bounce or disperse that beam of light. Even less after its level had risen as much as it has. Yet when it attempted to affect the mana as it did before, there arose a problem. Some kind of interference appeared, and the mana pattern it was used in shifted slightly. This was enough to take it off guard and take a massive blow that almost cost it the new life that it had gained.

Luckily one of its minions was close behind it. The Lich was quick to order it to act and was quickly evacuated from that location. While it was interested in the being that set it free it was still more interested in surviving. This instinct had been ingrained in its very being and would activate whenever death was near. Now its body was being quickly reformed with the help of the ever respawning worms.

During the escape, it ordered two of its special undead to contend with the armored being but one of them ended up dead. These obsidian ones had a special connection with it and each time one perished the Lich would know. Now after its plan had failed and its life was in danger it had to think it through. Its life was far more important than the armored one but it couldn't just let it escape.

There were also other interesting beings out there, they looked similar to the one it was after but they had their differences. Their behavior was strange, sometimes they would endanger themselves to save weaker members of their group. On other occasions, they would use them as decoys while trying to escape. The way they acted was quite a mystery which the Lich wanted to figure out.

One thing was clear, one of its powerful undead soldiers had died and the small army it created wasn't enough. If this continued perhaps stronger creatures would appear and would try to kill it. For such an occasion it needed to be prepared. Two choices presented themselves to the monster. Should it bunker up in this cavern where it was somewhat safe or should it do something more drastic?

Right on cue the same gargoyle minion that saved it appeared. It was given a secondary task and had returned with a few large crystals in both its hands. These were some strange minerals that it came across when it was chasing after the armored one. Inside of them resided a vast amount of mana and it would attempt to harness it.

Its body had recovered enough for it to grasp one of the glowing minerals. The Lich had a vast quantity of mana inside of itself but even it had a limit. After getting blasted and using a recovery skill it was now almost drained. To create an army worth its level it needed some help and this would be the weapon that it needed.

While this would help it produce more soldiers the real reason it was able to get this far was a bit deeper inside this cavern it found. When entering further a large open area with lava flowing from the sides appeared. There in the middle of this large area, a strange being that the Lich decided to use was.

This creature was quite strange, it covered half of this cavern and its body was tremendous. Yet even with the help of those dimensions, it couldn't do anything. It just sat there and produced eggs that within a few hours turned into the earth traveling worms. The production never stopped and each time the egg hatched a skeletal soldier could be created from it.

The number of these fleshy containers vastly outpaced the mana the Lich had. Now with the mana mineral it had grabbed from the secret mining area, it would finally be able to use all of this biomass and with it, the creatures on the upper levels would know its wrath.

### **Chapter 270: Uneasiness.**

“Can’t believe that we are already on the first floor... that saved us several hours of walking.”

Armand was looking at the path leading towards the exit. While they didn’t get here faster than Lobelia they weren’t that far behind. With the shortcuts, Roland had always minimized the trip into the larger dungeon area even when lugging the mule golem with him.

“You’ll have to show me how to open those tunnels when this all blows over, what are you going to do now?”

“I need to get back to my workshop, Elodia and the kids should be there, we need to prepare for the worst possible scenario.”

“Worst possible scenario? What do you mean, isn’t it over? We just need to wait for a team of platinum ranks to arrive and take back the dungeon. Haha, this will be quite of a payoff, I bet they will need a lot of gold ranks to handle these weak skeletons!”

Armand smiled while nodding to himself. To him, this looked like a chance to earn it big, with the Lich loose in the dungeon it was an opportunity. They would certainly be tasked by the guild with taking out the creature but as a gold rank, he didn’t need to worry about facing any dangerous monsters. That would be all up to the platinum ranks that were all tier 3 class holders.

“There won’t be time for a platinum party to show up.”

“Huh, what do you mean?”

“Didn’t you notice it? Those skeletons were easily able to get through the boss chamber, have you ever seen monsters from a lower level going through one of these.”

“Now that you mention it...”

Roland could see the cogs turning in Armand’s brain and him finally realizing that there was a bigger problem at hand.

“Wait... but doesn’t that mean!”

“Yes, this will probably turn into a dungeon break.”

“Hold on, a dungeon break, here off all places!?”

Armand and every other adventurer knew what a dungeon break was but it was not something that just happened. It was hard to even see one of those happening during a person’s whole adventurer career and now one was upon them. This was even less likely when new dungeons like this were involved which was a hard pill to swallow.

“We need to get to the city and warn the others... fuck, I need to get home to the kids! Wait what about the rest, aren’t some of them at your place?”

Armand started panicking the moment the scenario changed. The swarm of skeletons that was in the dungeon could emerge from within and turn their sights on the city. Depending on how many of them there were and also the tier 3 variants, it could potentially be a bloodbath.

The biggest problem was the lack of tier 3 and above class holders that lived here. Roland knew of the existence of one tier 3 class holder in the whole city. This was the guild master who was of an unknown level and could potentially be able to defeat the Lich in a fair battle.

Then there was also an unconfirmed one, the guild master of the thieves guild. However, that person was a big mystery and no one truly knew the extent of their power or their real gender. Thieve classes were masters of disguise so it was almost impossible to tell when a tier 3 class holder wanted to hide.

A person like that couldn't really be trusted with anything and it wouldn't be strange if they just bunkered up in the underground for everything to blow over. Perhaps if the monsters made it far into the city and affected their bottom line, then there was a possibility that they would act.

These were the only permanent members in the city with sometimes platinum-rank adventurers passing by. Normally, the city lord would at least have one powerful knight that was at this level. Arthur Valerian didn't gain enough favor with anyone of that prestige to swear their allegiance to him yet.

As it stood now, Roland was probably the strongest member of that faction that he wasn't really a true member of. He was just working together to make money but after this blunder, he would really need those connections to not get thrown in prison.

"As I said, I'll take care of Elodia, she's probably still at the shop and as long as those higher-tier skeletons don't leave the dungeon it shouldn't be that much of a problem."

"... Alright, I'll leave her to you and I hope you are right, Leave getting in touch with the guild to me!"

"Thank you."

Armand and Roland nodded at each other before parting ways. Normally Roland would use the secret tunnel toward his dungeon but for the time being, he needed more information. When going up the stairs word had already reached the guards and people were evacuating. Just as he had expected a large part of the adventurers just remained outside to wait and examine the situation.

There differed vastly in ranks and ranged from newbies that weren't even level ten to people close to level hundred. The latter were quite rare so if the early level tier 2 monsters actually burst through the entrance it wouldn't be strange if some of them died. This wouldn't do, he needed to inform the guards about the potential dungeon break. Armand would inform the guild of this new finding while he needed to get everyone's attention.

'Uh... I never liked public presentations.'

Roland thought back to his past life and the weird period of life that was high school. Even to this day he never understood why they forced the students to perform annoying presentations to each other. The vast majority of the time no one was listening and if you made a blunder then everyone made fun of you for it. Now that he was an adult the uneasiness didn't really go away as he didn't really have that much experience with them.

“Can I have everyone’s attention?”

His voice was magnified by a quick rune alteration in his helmet. The adventurers outside were taken by surprise, no one expected a loud booming voice to suddenly spring forth from the armored man. Some had already taken a peek at him as his getup was quite characteristic and now he had their attention.

“The situation in the dungeon is direr than the guild had expected, it is believed that a dungeon break is going to take place.”

“What did you say? A dungeon break, are you crazy? There must be something wrong with your information, who told you this.”

“Please calm down and let me explain...”

“You expect us to be calm? Who the hell are you anyway?”

“Isn’t that the runesmith? Why would he be speaking for the guild? He should go back to the workshop.”

“Yeah, go back to making swords and leave the adventuring to the pros! Who would believe this nonsense.”

The people that were listening from afar didn’t give him the chance to explain. The moment he claimed that there was a dungeon break waiting to happen they didn’t believe him. This was a hard pill to swallow for people who only heard distant rumors of breaks transpiring in the distant past. They all were more inclined to think that he was lying to vacate the premises or to do something unsavory when they panicked.

“Hey, will you idiots calm down, Mr. Wayland is not a liar!”

“That’s right, what if he is telling the truth, let him speak and just shut up!”

To his surprise, a group of four young adventurers stepped forward. Two girls and two young men with familiar faces. It was the same group that he saved from a trap and also his first real customers after he opened his shop. With them staring down at the others, he was finally able to speak.

“Thank you, as I was saying. A tier 3 Lich has appeared in the dungeon, it is able to create tier 2 ranked skeleton soldiers that range from level fifty to sixty. I and others have seen them being able to run through the boss's chamber which should not be possible. There is a high possibility that they will be able to get outside and we don’t know the extent of their numbers and other tier 3 skeletons have been sighted with them.”

“A tier 3 Lich? Why would something like that be down there...”

“They got past the boss chamber? But that’s not supposed to happen...?”

For now, Roland was finished with his speech. Even though he was responsible for releasing the Lich into the dungeon he could not be responsible for the people here if they ignored this information. Some of them would probably believe him and return to the city to seek shelter while others would remain to see it for themselves. Others might even see this as a chance to gain some money, the tier 2 bones left over by the skeletal soldiers could be sold as crafting materials.



“Are you speaking the truth?”

“I am, I’m not sure how fast the skeletons will reach this level or if they will but it would be wise to be cautious.”

One of the guards that were stationed at the entrance walked up to him while the adventurers were discussing. The man’s face went quickly pale as he was required to stay here and guard the entrance. If monsters actually started pouring out he and the few sentries that were placed here would be required to act. If they didn’t then they could be sent to prison for desertion.

“Don’t worry, the guild should have been informed and so should Lord Arthur. I don’t think he would blame you if you retreated in these circumstances.”

Roland took a glance at the soldier before him. His level wasn’t high at all, it wasn’t over fifty which would put him below a skeletal monster. Besides these two guards here there was a small camp setup around here. There were perhaps twenty soldiers here with the captain being the only person over tier 1.

With the current lack of resources, Arthur was just unable to place more forces outside the city. This was mostly due to the fact that there wasn’t really anything worth protecting here. What happened inside of the dungeon was outside their grasp and every adventurer still needed to go to the guild to sell the resources they gathered.

The only thing between the dungeon and the city were peddlers that sold some necessities, like potions and travel food for people that forgot to bring them from the city. These were created from large wagons that returned to the safety of the city if it got too late. Thus the evacuation effort could go smoothly if only everyone believed in the information that he gave. Thanks to the small party of young adventurers it seemed that at least some people were backing off.

“That is all, decide for yourselves if you want to stay here but be warned, these creatures should not be handled by anyone below the silver rank.”

Roland was through with his quick speech. When looking at the group of four he just nodded as a sign of gratitude. The one that went by the name Rudy smiled back as if being glad that he could be of some use. Now it was time for him to return home and so he quickly activated his stat boosters and took off. It was quite a surprise to see the speed he was capable of and only made the whole thing seem more serious.

“What level is that guy... if even he is afraid of those monsters then perhaps we should really go back to the city...”

Not long after the armored man was gone a large chunk of adventurers started backing off. More and more of the people remaining in the dungeon came pouring out which only fueled their worries. It was clear that this was too much for a single Lich sighting, there must have been more to it, a dungeon break wasn’t that outlandish anymore.

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“Mary, is this true?”

“My lord, I see that you spoke to the guild master already.”

“Yes, he said something about a Lich being sighted in the dungeon, he didn’t really explain himself and said that the guild would handle it but can they? He really requested quite the sum.”

Arthur Valerian had a big frown on his face. The whole conversation went by too quickly, it seemed that the guild master from the adventurers guild didn’t like him too much. There wasn’t much info besides a Lich appearing out of nowhere. In reality, this would fall into the guild’s jurisdiction but as the city lord had to sponsor at least part of the job.

If the dungeon remained closed off and adventurers were unable to farm for materials the city would lose a lot of taxable income. In reality, Arthur’s position was in far more danger than that of the guild master. Even if the dungeon was destroyed Aurdhan could just leave and find work elsewhere while the city he was running slowly died.

The only way to speed up the process would be to place a large bounty on the Lich’s head. This reward was of course provided by the guild but to get things rolling faster a noble normally added some wealth to attract powerful tier 3 adventures. Those experts would not just leave their cozy homes and travel all the way to the middle of nowhere for nothing.

“My apologies my lord but I have not been able to find anything substantial.”

Mary the maid bowed in shame as she was unable to deliver the required information to her lord. She had been tasked with running the intelligence gathering agency and there were even plans of expanding but with how little budget she had things were hard. As the news dropped in the city she was informed by one of her guild contacts but it wasn’t anything new.

“It’s not your fault, if you had some proper attendants under you, then this would have never happened but that doesn’t matter now, if a Lich has appeared then it must be dealt with haste.”

“I agree my Lord, if it festers for too long it will affect our bottom line but hiring tier 3 adventures won’t be that easy.”

“I know but I must... hm?”

“My lord?”

Arthur raised his hand as he heard a beeping sound. It was coming from inside of his desk drawer that he quickly opened up. Mary was curious why the lord was raising his hand to quiet her down but soon she realized that he was holding a small crystal ball. It was the one Wayland the runesmith had offered the lord not that long ago after setting up the turrets around the city.

It came together with a flat piece of metal with an incline section to place the orb inside. At first, both of them thought it was some kind of toy version of the usual magic ball but in actuality, it had an ingenious function. Instead of seeing the person on the other side, only a short text message would be sent through it.

The buttons that were on the plate had pre-programmed texts that Arthur could send towards Wayland if he ever needed him. It was mainly a device to inform him about a meeting, with a function that

toggled through the times of the day. In the end, something like 'Meeting, tomorrow, afternoon' Would be sent without the need of sending a letter and letting anyone know of this ever happening.

Now on the other hand the device was beeping and flashing without him activating it. There was a small pocket for mana fluid for such an occasion but a secondary battery needed to be attached for the message to get through. Just as he was instructed Arthur brought out what was supposed to be a runic battery and placed it on the designated spot on the plate. After a little clicking sound, the orb began glowing brighter and text started to quickly appear.

"..."

"What is it, my lord?"

"This is..."

Mary was surprised by Arthur's behavior and wanted to peek over his shoulder. It took a few seconds for him to rapidly raise himself from his seat, his hand slamming hard on the desk where he placed the magical orb on.

"This can be, how can there be a dungeon break in this city? Am I really this unlucky?"

"Dungeon break?"

Mary was even more stunned, was there really a dungeon break happening as they spoke? If it was then it would certainly bring everyone's attention to this area but for all the wrong reasons...