

Runesmith 271

Chapter 271: Evacuating the compound.

“Would you like to test this runic dagger before making a purchase? We also offer a second one at a five percent discount if you buy two. If you find the runic enchantment to not be satisfactory we can also offer a different one, do you wish to see our enchantment catalog?”

“A discount? Five percent that would be...uh... what’s a catalog?”

Elodia smiled at the man that was looking at the bladed weapon section of the store. They had various dagger variations and short swords in stock for the scout types that this man here was. A person could even order a custom rune engraving with a spell they wanted for a higher price instead of buying the standardized weapons with the usual spells on them.

“You can see the catalog there, it has pictures and explanations of all the spells and prices.”

She pointed the adventurer towards a large book. It was attached to a large stand that couldn’t be moved. When flipping through the pages the man could see various colorful depictions of spells with detailed information.

There were even some damage numbers depending on the spell. For instance, the easiest sharpness spell could be enhanced with a chilling effect. It explained that the flame-based creatures in the dungeon would succumb to this type of runic enchantment a lot easier than to others. There were a few other common combinations that went well with each other besides these.

“The prices aren’t that bad...”

The man commented after going through what he could get. Compared to the dwarven stores the prices here were slightly lowered. The quality of the magic was on another level while the weapons in themselves weren’t that far behind.

“Wait... I can have my own weapon enchanted?” “That’s right sir, you’ll just have to leave it for a few days. Our runesmith will enchant them with the spell that you desire but if the weapon is of bad quality he might deny the request.”

The man nodded while thinking over this proposition. When going by the catalog this would be the cheapest option from them all. It seemed that the craftsman needed to analyze the weapon first before deciding. Not every item was meant for enchanting, he needed to bring over a weapon made from at least deepsteel.

“I’ll have to think about it...”

“Take your time sir, our runesmith will be accepting new items in a week.”

Elodia bowed to the man that after going through the book finally left the store. This catalog was an idea brought up by the store owner along with the pictures. It was a simple idea but she could already see the power of visualization. The adventurers were inclined to buy more after going through the flashy drawings and good prices. She wasn’t sure why but if they listed something with a price that ended with ninety-nine or ninety-five the item sold better. It was as if the price dropped by a whole gold coin while it only decreased by a single silver coin.

“Not that many customers today...”

After looking out through the window she gave out a sigh. Today had been a slow day for some reason. But thanks to this she could check up on the new store worker that had been doing her own task.

“How is it going, Marcie?”

“I’m finished with one...”

In a smaller side room Marcie the new scribe worker was sitting at a small desk. On it there was ink and various quills with which she could practice her craft. As a scribe, she could write a lot faster than a regular person as well as copy down what had been put to paper. Her task was to duplicate some fliers Roland had created with his own superior drawing skill that a scribe could also procure. It was different to a painter’s painting skill which was focused on canvas paintings and multiple colors.

“Let me see... Well done, the lines are a lot better this time around, did your skill level up?”

“Hehe.”

The girl nodded with a smile on her face which caused Elodia to brighten up as well. Ever since she got the orphans to work here the place felt a lot warmer. Marcie spent a lot of time with her in the shop which made time pass faster. Then Jorg was inside of the crafting compound going through some tasks that Bernir gave him. Even Fin showed up from time to time as he was working as a delivery boy during his trial for the guild.

‘Everything is moving forward, I’m sure all the kids will be able to find jobs.’

Things seemed to be going well, with more of the children working the weight on her shoulders started to decrease. Money was not a problem anymore and within the next few years, all of the kids would be able to start their journey into adulthood. While she didn’t think that she would ever stop worrying, everyone would at least have a brighter future waiting for them, and that had always been her main goal.

The shortage of customers brought her outside. The weather was nice and the green grass was surrounding them from all sides. With the inclusion of Jorg the idea of developing a stone pathway had been brought up. This would be a long-term project but would also allow the child to level up his class rather fast. Everything was in the process of measuring but perhaps in a few weeks, the young half-dwarf could start his first long-term project.

“Hm?... Is that...Roland?”

She whispered in a faint voice as she knew Roland didn’t want to have his real name spoken out. A runaway noble from a militaristic family was what she had fallen for. It sounded like a romance novel that she once read when she was younger. Before she knew it, their paths had intertwined with each other.

Thus the surprise on her face was quite visible. The man that everyone knew as Wayland the Runesmith was charging down the road at full speed. Behind him was a large wolf covered in red rubies that was having a hard time keeping up which was apparent by how much his tongue was sticking out and flopping around.

'Why is he back so soon, he usually is out for an entire week?'

Elodia wondered as this was the usual time that he disappeared down into the dungeon. While she didn't want to ask too many questions about his work, it was clear that he was bringing back various precious metals and minerals down from the mine.

To her knowledge, he had discovered a hidden mine that he was mining from but besides that, there wasn't really much else. Could someone have discovered the secret mining area? Could the dwarven union be up to no good once again?

"W-what's wrong?"

She blurted out right at the moment the armored man appeared before her. His speed was so tremendous that his feet dug into the ground as he tried to break. He ended up right before her with a cloud of dirt being thrown everywhere. The hired adventurer guard that was there jumped out with their sword drawn.

"It's fine, please put that down."

A bodyguard like this had always been taken from the guild whenever Roland went out for the mining expeditions. Together with various golems and protective turrets everywhere, the whole place was rather safe.

"We have a situation... first off, close the store then meet me on the inside and bring Bernir along... you there, go home to the city."

Without explaining much Roland pointed toward the hired guard to tell him to go home. Soon after he sprinted towards the gate to get to the inside of the compound.

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Roland didn't know how much time he had. The skeletons were tier 2 monsters and could even run faster than an average human. They would surely make it to the top levels and continue to chase after their targets if not stopped by their leader the Lich.

He did not know if it was even possible for that monster to pull back his forces after giving the initial order. The skills that allowed such monsters to control their created armies had a limit to them. At most he would have a closer connection to those higher level black skeletons instead.

If he got lucky only the initial burst of skeletons would make it up to the top floor. Perhaps the rest would remain down in the lower level to form a protective barrier around their master. Then the platinum party of adventurers that got hired could contend with the monster instead.

Even with that best-case scenario, there was still a problem. His house wasn't that far away from the dungeon and if the skeletons burst through the exit then it was in danger. The forest that somewhat disguised his property could potentially confuse the mindless monsters but it could also give them a chance to get closer.

His main line of defense was the large magical turrets and the large walls around his land. Even if they were breached for some reason they had a whole underground workshop to hide in. The monsters would probably give up chasing them if they weren't provoked or lost track of them.

The biggest problem here was all the magical devices. Monsters were always attracted to mana and skeletons made by that Lich could be troublesome. His enemy had gotten used to his unique mana pattern. Perhaps it had some kind of interest in it that couldn't be excluded. It did toss itself right at him and even into the mana beam. The same thing could happen here after they spotted the runic turrets or the weapons in the shop.

'Could that monster be drawn to me or something? Will it try to find me if I stay here or am I overthinking this?'

He was not really a monster specialist and whatever knowledge that he got from books couldn't really be confirmed. One thing was set in stone, he would not abandon his home in the face of this crisis. The defenses that he was setting up for all these years weren't just for show. This had all been prepared for a situation like this, if the skeletal forces came here then they would be met with turret fire.

'I should probably give Arthur a heads up...' After using a shortcut to get out of the dungeon he had a leg up over the miners. Considering the skeletons weren't that far behind that group, they would probably arrive sometime after them. There was still some time to warn people and prepare for a counterattack.

Luckily he had given his noble associate a communication crystal that he had turned into something similar to a phone. It could only forward texts but it was the fastest way of transferring information. While Arthur could only send pre-integrated sentences Roland wasn't that limited as someone that had access to the runic system.

He was planning to develop something similar to a keyboard for it later yet the thing was far from being able to imitate modern-day smartphones. First of all the mana requirements were immense. It burned through mana fluid or his batteries rather quickly, unless he improved the runic design it would only be fit for mages or people with way too much money.

'That should do it...'

After a quick message of the impending dungeon break, he went back to scrambling around his home. By this time Elodia and Bernir made their way down into the workshop where he was already preparing before Bernir could even ask about the problem he was given the newest model of the gun-staff.

"Take this, you might need it, also I need you to activate the reinforcements on the shop and take out any battle-ready golem you can find in the storage."

"Uh... Boss, what's going on? Are we getting attacked? Is it the Hathfordian Empire? But how did they get through those tidal currents and the sea king?"

"Hathfordian Empire? What are you talking about? No, it's monsters, skeletons to be exact, a Lich has appeared in the dungeon and the minions it produces could reach here, it's a Dungeon break."

"Oh my, a dungeon break? How could something like that occur?"

This time Elodia was the one to speak up as she tried to catch her breath. She as an old adventurer guild receptionist knew the most about such strange phenomena. Even though her mind was telling her that something like that wouldn't be possible she also didn't think that Roland would lie about such an occurrence.

“A dungeon break you say? But why would we worry about that, can’t the guild take care of it themselves?”

Replied Bernir who placed the oversized magical gun over his shoulder. From his perspective, they didn’t really need to do anything.

“You don’t understand, those monsters could get here, there were far too many...”

“Is it that bad?”

Bernir’s smirk vanished after he re-evaluated Roland's words. The more they saw him scrambling around the more they started to take everything seriously.

“Aye, I’ll go close the shop and take the pricier stock out, hey you there boy, come and help me out!”

“S-sure!”

Jorg had followed after Bernir but he was not really aware of the meaning behind the entire conversation. Marcie on the other hand remained quiet while standing behind Elodia that started to get worried. Roland realized that he couldn’t have kids running around here while murderous skeletons were loose.

“Elodia, it will probably be better if you take those two back to the city, you should stay there, it will be safer.”

“That’s fine but what will you do... are you really going to stay here?”

“Don’t worry, I can handle a few skeletons, they shouldn’t be able to get over the walls but you have to understand that you will be safer in the city.”

While Roland believed in his defenses it was still dangerous. His home was closer to the dungeon than the city was and would potentially draw in a large chunk of the skeletal warriors if they break outside. If Elodia along with the kids remained here it would only cause his mind to wonder. He needed to focus on defending his livelihood, Armand along with Lobelia should have arrived back at the city and would be more than enough to protect them.

“That’s...”

She looked back to Marcie that was behind her. The small ten-year-old girl didn’t really know what was happening but the serious expressions on their faces made her tense up. Elodia grasped the child's hand and finally gave in to the request without arguing. It was clear that the child needed to be brought to safety first.

Dyana was also around, with her help Bernir was able to quickly finish barricading the doors and placing some reinforcements on the windows. These already had metallic bars to prevent people from coming in but were further blocked by already fitting window covers. On the outside, the confused adventurer finally left for the city after being informed about the dungeon break.

The whole compound was surrounded by a large wall and barbed wire above it that could be electrified. The skeletons didn’t have flesh but they were not resistant to magical energies either. It all depended on their numbers but Roland was somewhat confident in being able to protect his property.

“Don’t worry Boss, I’ll get them all to safety but...”

“You have my gratitude, now go, I’ll be fine.”

After some time passed the whole area inside was occupied by spider drones. Bernir, Dyana, Elodia, and the two children had all gathered together. All of them were on their way to the city where Roland hoped for everyone to seek shelter. He did not believe that the monsters would be able to storm the city. There were far too many adventurers living there and if one of the tier 3 monsters appeared the guild master should be able to contend with it.

It was more dangerous to remain here in an enclosed space that could be easily sieged by the monsters. He was the only one that needed to remain to monitor the runic turrets and order his mechanized company of spider drones into battle. Without others around him, he would be able to focus on the task at hand.

“Awoo!”

“Yes you too Agni, get Elodia to safety, keep her and the little ones safe, that’s your mission do you understand?”

“Woof!”

The wolf looked a bit concerned but nodded as he understood the meaning of those words. Soon the group of five was delving back into the forest area while he continued to watch. Perhaps he was alone but he would not let any monster touch the property he had been working so many years on.

Chapter 273: The skeletons are loose.

While a certain Runesmith was deliberating if he should make a back-scratcher for his assistant things at the dungeon were starting to move along. Everyone that could have been evacuated was now outside and the guards were keeping others from going in. This of course didn’t go well with the adventurers that depended on the income that this underground monster mine provided for them.

“How long is this going to take? You can’t expect us to just stand here!”

“That’s right, do you know how much it costs to get a meal in this city?”

“Yeah! What will you do about the loss of coin!”

“Please settle down, this was ordered by the City Lord and also the adventure guild master, no one is to go in!”

The adventurers were somewhat disgruntled. The vast majority of them lived from a daily grind in the dungeon. The more adventurers appeared in the city the less they could get for the monster materials they excavated. Unless a person reached a silver grade they would have to be really careful about their expenses and living in inns didn’t come cheap.

Then there was a problem with the addictive nature of this bunch that the thieves guild knew how to exploit. Milking the adventurers by getting them addicted to gambling and the red light district was a big reason the underground guilds survived. It was a gray area with which even the nobles were fine with.

As long as they didn't need to see the debauchery they would look past it as the monetary gains were tremendous.

This left some of the less successful adventurers with some debt or needs that they just needed to satisfy. Even one day of not working could set them back tremendously or be a cause for them to be injured by the loan sharks. Those types weren't that forgiving and would probably not wait for the dungeon problem to be alleviated.

"This is dumb, just let me sign a paper and go in, we're not afraid of some stupid skeletons!"

"Yeah, that's right, let us through!"

A group of angry steel rank adventurers started pushing forward, to them this was not a problem. If they ran into strong monsters they could just retreat. The loss of money was too big of a problem and they were always willing to put their lives in danger to progress. There weren't that many guards here to block the way down so they didn't see a problem in pushing their way forward.

"What do you think you are doing!"

"Get out of the way."

In reality, the guards didn't really care if the adventurers went down and got themselves killed. The only reason they were here was that they were given a direct order by the new city lord. Even though Arthur Valerian was just a noble in name it was one that could not be ignored.

The guards were still only commoners that had a very small chance of becoming higher-tier soldiers and perhaps knights if they proved themselves to a noble lord that could make that a possibility. Even the man that was in the city could potentially raise them up to this position but no one seriously believed in that. Some would even scoff at the idea of being a knight of such a bastard as it would be a true dead end.

"Rudy, shouldn't we go? You heard what Mr. Wayland said."

"Yeah but... It's hard to believe, we should wait and see first."

The group of young adventurers that Roland had a run-in with and also sold runic equipment to had remained in place. They were away from the entrance and the group of people that were trying to get it. Their curiosity got to them as they had a hard time believing that the dungeon monsters could go out the exit. To them it was natural for the dungeon creatures to back off whenever they reached a safe location, it was a truth of this world.

"I'm not that great at running..."

"Miron has a point, maybe we should back away further..."

"It shouldn't be a problem, with those guys in the front even if the monsters come out they will act as a distraction."

The red-haired youth commented which made everyone shake their heads.

"Do you even have a conscience?"

“Huh? Did I say something that wasn’t right?”

“...Wait... something is coming!”

Before the group could explain to their ‘leader’ that it was wrong to use others as meat shields, they spotted a change in the group of adventurers. Previously they were clawing to get into the dungeon but suddenly they all went quiet.

“What’s happening, I can’t see!”

Rudy and his group were peeking from behind a tree in a safe location. The large group of adventurers and guards were blocking almost everything. Suddenly they all started backing away from the entrance as if to open the path for something. This was followed by a strange sound coming from within the entrance which quickly began to get louder.

“It really is a skeleton!”

“Hey, that thing is running up the stairs!” “They were actually right?”

The adventurers were met by a lone monster that had sprinted up the stairs and actually broken through the barrier that should not be broken. It was an undead monster with flames coming out of its head and body parts, somewhat similar to the flaming skeletons they met inside of the dungeon. It had some differences which were the thickness of the bones, its height, and the amount of flames coming out from its body.

“Shit, it's a tier 2!”

“Quick, kill it!”

Most of the adventurers that were in the front were of steel rank and had not gotten their own tier 2 class. Battling a tier 2 monster of this grade was possible if they combined their numbers and this one was not very coordinated. It just started swinging a bladed bone around and charged at the first person it could. With so many people around it quickly found itself being turned into a pin cushion to spears.

“It's still alive, don’t use spears, use blunt weapons instead!”

The panicked adventures forgot that stabbing attacks weren’t all that great against skeletal creatures. Only after maces and hammers were utilized was the creature finally dispatched. How it squirmed on the ground until its head was shattered was quite concerning. However, it was not as concerning as the fact that it actually made it out of the dungeon.

“Shit... t-there is another one coming, watch out!”

This was not the end as after the lone undead appeared another two started crawling out from within the entrance. Some of the less brave adventurers started shuffling behind the city guards that were somewhat forced to keep the monsters at bay. Some others saw this as a chance of getting free resources as the bones of tier 2 monsters did fetch a good price on the market.

“Calm down, are there any silver ranks here? Go to the front, they are only mindless undead!”

One of the few silver ranked adventures that remained shouted. It was an older man with a shield and sword combo that could potentially be used in this situation. While blunt damage was best to shatter the bones a longsword could still cut down this type of monster to disable it.

“Hey, Rudy... I think we should leave this to the true silver ranks... those things are all tier 2 monsters...”

“Yeah...”

The group of four was in an in-between stage, half of them were fresh tier 2 class holders while the other half were close to getting to level fifty. Their speed of progression wasn't too fast or too slow as they took their time. After almost dying in the middle levels they had taken a step back and decided to take a slower safe approach. Even now this strategy allowed them to make the decision of removing themselves from danger just as Roland had instructed everyone.

“What's with this shit experience, are these really tier 2 monsters?”

Thus they started retreating toward the city while also gathering some late intel. It seemed that the monsters weren't giving that much experience for being killed. This lowered the worth of this incident even further.

“Let's just wait, we can take an escort mission if it becomes troublesome.”

“Good idea.”

Rudy and Sansa nodded at each other before removing themselves from this situation. On their way to the city, they bumped into some adventurer parties heading out along with a small unit of guards in flashy armor. It seemed that things were indeed dire if the city guard was involved.

There weren't that many people living outside of the city on this side. Most of the farmland was on the other side with just a few buildings here and there. Even then they saw some of the city guards going to these houses probably to inform the people living there about the potential threat. This was only made more apparent after they all arrived in the city. It was very loud and some people were even screaming.

“If they are forcing people into the city then it must be worse than we thought...”

Sansa commented while having to shuffle through the crowded streets that were filled with various individuals. Merchants weren't allowed to even leave anymore which kind of put a wrench in their previous plan. At first, they wanted to go to the guild for more information but had to go to a nearby tavern due to the swarm of angry adventurers.

As time passed things didn't really change but instead, the problem became even worse. More people were forced into the city and had to remain there while the city gates were closed. It was clear that this dungeon break wasn't that simple if they chose to barricade the citizens behind the freshly built-up walls. Only when the city bell resounded through the entire city did everyone realize just how much trouble they were in.

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“So... these red dots are the skeletons?”

“Yes.”

“And this here is the dungeon and that oval thing is where we are?”

“Yes.”

“But that means that they are coming this way.”

“Yeah, they are and they will be here in a few minutes so you should get ready.”

“Aye...”

Roland replied to Bernir that was looking at a little map interface that was inside the workshop. It was created from a crystal ball that had been slightly stretched out on the sides to produce something similar to a small screen. On it, anyone could see the places that Roland had mapped and if there were any devices to forward the signal nearby they could see movement.

Some time ago the dungeon break had finally started and the first skeleton soldiers had started pushing through. At first, it seemed that the guards and adventurers that were gathered there were keeping up but with time the number of skeletons skyrocketed. It was like a never-ending wave of tier 2 monsters that didn't tire or fear anything. They just pushed on towards the nearest living being to slay.

They had made it up the stairs a lot sooner than he or probably anyone else had expected. There was just not enough manpower at the time or willing participants to block their ascension. Perhaps if so many adventurers didn't retreat so soon it would have been possible to block the monsters inside. Collapsing the entrance or barricading it with something was also an option but shoving a wagon in the way of tier 2 monsters wouldn't block them for long.

‘No one expected this to happen and a closed dungeon entrance would open itself up again even if we blew down the ceiling.’

From the literature he read about dungeon breaks, creating a cave-in could be counterproductive. Dungeons were strange things and creating an entrance was something it would just do. If the entrance was forcefully closed a dungeon would create another one. While this could produce some time the next entrance could pop up anywhere. This could complicate things if it spawned inside the city or too close to it. The monsters on the inside would still be there and sometimes just multiplied to no end which made things a lot harder to contain.

“Do you think that those monsters will come here?”

“I don't know, they might find Albrook more interesting.”

Bernir nodded while looking out towards the forest area. The two had gone outside and gone up to a higher vantage point. They had a lot of things going for them, having the high ground and magical weapons were quite a promising defensive measure. The monsters were practically immune to arrows and would require blunt weapons and a lot of force to shatter.

These enemies were even somewhat problematic for magic users. Undead creatures weren't that affected by cold and frost spells. Thus it would make it harder to kill them by freezing as it would not halt their advances as much. Instead, something more neutral like an earth bolt or regular mana bolt would have been more effective.

Exposure to mana would interfere with this undead monster's peculiar core. Just like golems skeletal undead came equipped with a similar feature. This core wasn't quite as round or big but it worked in a similar fashion. Only when it was destroyed would the monster truly die and magical attacks could directly affect its integrity with divine-based ones being able to completely shatter it with little to no effort.

'Burying all those sensors in the forest doesn't sound like such a paranoid idea now.'

Roland had been unreasonably distrustful from the day he arrived here. Already then he was making plans of defending this location from cultists or thieves. After developing his mapping technology he made sure to plant it all around the forest and his home. The entire space within a half-kilometer radius of his house was now on his map. It took some digging and a lot of money but thanks to this he could see the first skeleton soldier appearing.

Bernir was not aware of this as he just stood there while squinting his eyes to potentially discover a monster between the bushes. Roland on the other hand was tracing the walking path of the monster that was moving fast but without any sense of direction. It even ran around in a circle before deciding to go in a straight line.

'These creatures seem to only charge forward, it seems to be evading the trees and then just charging forward in a straight line...'

It was not the only one there as more dots started to appear and finally one of them bumped into the road leading towards his compound. It was just a regular dirt path a bit wider than usual with most of the branches taken to the side to make it easier for his customers to arrive. This apparently was enough to make the monster that found it follow it and finally one of them arrived at his doorstep.

"B-boss!"

"I see it, calm down, there is only one now, let the turrets handle it."

The flames within the monster's eye socket made it stand out instantly. Even Bernir finally noticed that it was there as it jolted forward. It did slow down for a moment after arriving at the open area but the moment it discovered his home and the people that were looking at it, the monster charged.

Its angry rush was quickly halted by a blue bolt of energy that collided with its chest. The whole place was surrounded by turrets which were now on high alert and would instantly shoot whenever they identified a monster. Their power was at around the second tier of a lower level magician and quite enough to take out a skeletal minion.

"Hah, that's it?"

"Awoo?"

Bernir gave out a sigh of relief as he saw the charging monster be blown back by the energy bolt. Then as it tried to stand up it was just pelted two more times until it was fully dead. It seemed that around two or three shots were all it took to get this undead to stop but this didn't mean they were in the clear.

The turret's cannon shut down the firing mechanism but was now smoking. There was a short cooling period that this weapon needed to go through so depending on how many unwanted guests they got, it could get spicy.

"Get ready, more of them are coming."

"Woof!"

"But not you Agni, stay behind the wall for now."

"Woo?"

It seemed that the path paved by his customers and somewhat by Bernir had become a gathering point for the undead. Perhaps they had some senses after all and could tell that it led somewhere. The map was slowly becoming covered in red dots and all of them were in a conga line toward his home. For the time being he would leave it to the turrets as they were the main line of defense, if they became overrun then his golems and also Agni that was looking sad would finally join the fight.