

Runesmith 274

Chapter 274: Defending.

It started out slow, one or two skeletal fiends at a time. The turrets didn't have a problem aiming at the undead creatures that just rushed without any fret for their own lives. They were like guiding missiles aiming for the closest living being or magical object in the vicinity. In this case, it was one of his turrets that didn't even need to move to shoot at the charging blazing skeleton.

Each time one of them was dead he was given a very minimal amount of experience points. This was quite annoying as otherwise killing the vast quantity of these creatures would help him achieve tier 3 a lot faster. However, he would need to worry about that after he took care of the problem before him.

There was one main road leading from the dungeon to the city. Roland had already witnessed the monsters following even smaller paths like the one to his house. Probably the majority of these monsters would end up at the city gates while a smaller number was funneled towards his side instead.

"Hey, Boss."

"What is it? Did they sneak around the back?"

"No, it's a message from the missus."

Roland turned towards Bernir who for the time being had gone down from the walls. Instead, he went to the workshop to look at the map there. While the minimap in his armor was similar it was a much smaller screen. It was a lot easier to look through the larger one that was down in the workshop.

Besides it, there were the usual communication crystal balls, one of them he had lent to Elodia a few weeks before. It came equipped with a few battery packs and had a speed dial connection to his workshop.

"Bring it over then, I can use it without the support items."

Bernir was quick to move with the crystal ball over. Normally anyone that wanted to use these items and wasn't a mage needed to use specialized runic devices. However, Roland was the one that made this one and had the required mana to run it. As soon as the blinking ball made it into his hand he injected some mana into it. The surface started shining brightly before calming down and showing a close-up of Elodia's nose.

"You don't need to lean so closely to it..."

"Ah..."

He smiled slightly under his helmet as he saw her jolt away to make her face fully visible. The crystal ball that was in the orphanage was hidden away in a sturdy cupboard. Thus after opening it Elodia usually just leaned down really closely without realizing that it would mess up the image.

There was a solution for this, if he implemented a golemic eye it could function as a webcam. Crystal balls came equipped with this feature as a default so no one really bothered to change the design. Perhaps it was a quality-of-life upgrade but it would still be hard to sell it to people that were used to the old technology.

"I see that you are safe, are you all at your house?"

"Yes, Lobelia is with us."

For a moment he could hear some sounds coming from behind Elodia which made it hard to hear. Elodia wasn't the only person in the room as the orphans were there. The young kids had never really had the chance to play with a magic device like this, thus they continued to ask questions with eyes wide open.

"Hey, is that Uncle Wayland?"

"Is it, why is he wearing that funny helmet?"

"That's enough, everyone out of the room!"

"Booo!"

He could hear Lobelia's voice squabbling with some of the orphans. Luckily within a few minutes, they were able to clear out the room and he could finally talk to her in private.

"How is it? Did they lock down the city?"

"Yes they did, they sounded the warning bell and aren't letting people leave the city, Lobelia was outside, the soldiers are forcing people to go back to their homes and the rest are at the square."

"What is the guild doing about it? Are they organizing something?"

"There was an

Announcement

from the city lord, they are going to form a Militia, and Armand decided to join it."

It seemed that Lobelia was the only combatant left in the orphanage. Armand as always probably saw it as a chance to show off however he wasn't that stupid. He must have been convinced that Elodia and the kids would be safe in the orphanage otherwise, he would have stayed with them.

"He did? That's like him, what of the outside did they spot any undead?"

"Yes but they had managed to dispatch them before they got to the gates, they are reassuring everyone that this won't take long... but what about you? Are you safe?"

"I'm fine, though I didn't expect Bernir to show up, Dyana must be livid..."

"She was... but she managed to calm down but she understands."

Roland nodded as he knew that Bernir's and Dyana's success and livelihood were tied to his workshop. If it was overrun by undead creatures then it would take a while to recover.

"Don't worry, the skeletons are relatively weak, there won't be a problem the runic turrets will be enough."

Elodia nodded but he wasn't sure if she believed him. In reality, he wasn't sure how this predicament would play itself out. The monsters weren't that strong but there were a lot of them. Then there were

the superior undead that were quite troublesome, if one of them showed up at his doorstep then it would get spicy.

“Are you sure? Wouldn’t it be better if you come back to the city, I’m sure yo.. we can rebuild everything later, there is no reason to put yourself in danger.”

“No reason huh?”

Roland knew that if he just went back to the city then everything would probably be fine. Everything would probably work out in one way or another, his home might not even be destroyed as what was important was the underground workshop and not what was above.

However, after living in this house for so long he was getting sentimental. He could not stomach just letting this place be destroyed. There was another reason as well, he was tired of constantly running away. This was a chance for him to finally fight back and not run away like the two last times. At the moment he had amassed enough knowledge and experience to stem the tide.

“I can’t do that and stop worrying, I’m not going to put my life in danger, me and Bernir are just going to stay here for a few days until the city lord calls for a platinum party to take care of the Lich, it won’t be a problem.”

“But...”

“I’ll be fine, just trust me!”

Elodia gave out a sigh and nodded. The crystal ball started blinking a bit as the time for conversation was coming to an end. Just as any magical device there was a certain time limit. In this case, it was built in to limit the deterioration of the runes if the call took too long then the ball could even shatter.

“The crystal ball is at the limit, I’ll contact you later, stay safe.”

“You too, don’t do anything danger...”

Elodia was cut off at the end of the sentence but he knew what she wanted. While his workshop and home were important they were not worth giving his life for. As someone that was close to getting his tier 3 class, there was always a chance to rebuild. Even seeking shelter at the magical academy would be an option as he could also moonlight as a Runic Mage with his skillset.

“Boss, we have a situation... there are a lot of them coming!”

Bernir called out to him but he was already aware of it thanks to his Parallel Thinking trait. The runic turrets were starting to smoke up the place as they continued to fire on the approaching skeletal monsters. The pile of bones before his store was beginning to get bigger and the monsters even started to pile from other directions.

Finally, one of the monsters made it through and started pounding on the gate with its boney fists. The creature had a surprising amount of power as each fist strike made the metallic construction rattle a bit. Roland reacted accordingly and used a few well-placed guiding mana arrow spells to take the monster out.

This was not over though as more and more began making it through the defenses and the turrets finally reached the limit. As the smoke coming from them increased they started to initiate the cooling procedure to conserve their runic structures. With them in a momentary shutdown, it was up to Bernir and him to contend with the increase in targets.

Luckily if it came to firepower they still had the advantage. The large 'wand' that Bernir was holding with both hands started lighting up with runes before releasing a mass of small blue energy bolts. Each one was a tiny condensed energy projectile somewhat similar to a bullet.

While this weapon didn't have much accuracy when it came to hitting a large number of targets it was superior to others. Bernir just needed to point it in the general direction of the four skeletal monsters that were charging at him and they would be riddled with mana bullets. Before they could reach the wall he was standing on they were riddled with holes. It was a brute force way to get to their cores but worked fine in this situation.

Roland looked at his assistant that was screaming loudly and wanted to laugh at the Rambo impression he was performing. He on the other hand went with his trusted method of locking on to the monsters with the help of his armor's targeting system. There was no need to use large attacks if the homing magical missiles were enough.

A large ball of energy flew out of his hammer and exploded up in the sky. The mana bolts rained down like meteors and cleared out a vast number of enemies at a rate much higher than of the turrets. His stats were so enhanced that it only took one shot each to explode a monster.

With the two blacksmiths defending their workshop now in active combat, the turrets had enough time to cool themselves down and go back into action. The whole area turned blue and the sound of magical explosions was everywhere.

Agni who was initially ordered to stay behind the gate joined the two on the upper wall as well. Even though his specialty was fire that the skeletons were resistant to they weren't immune to it. His high level compared to theirs was enough to make the fireballs he shot out to deliver critical damage. While he took his time to make each spell appear it was at a rate that was indeed helpful.

At first, it might have seemed that the undead monsters could be able to overrun the runic smithy but soon a critical error in their approach became apparent. Even though they strayed off the initial path a bit there was no intelligence in their approach. They did not try to surround them or use the trees as shields, the skeletons just poured in with no worry for their own safety. Their numbers were vast but the firepower on Roland's side was overbearing and with time those numbers started dwindling.

Roland wasn't sure what was happening in the city but if the monsters acted like this then there was hope. With all the preparations against the cultists the side that faced the dungeon was also equipped with his turrets. The soldiers were also in possession of divine weaponry which would be devastating against the undead.

"...Stop, that was the last of them."

"AHhhh.... huh?"

Bernir was shouting loudly as Roland placed his hand on his shoulder to bring him back to reality. The monster wave was over but the rain of magical bullets from Bernir's weapon continued to fly toward the trees.

"Was that it? Did we win?"

"For now."

Roland saw Bernir drop down onto his posterior after the confirmation about the attack being over. Even though he looked fine his whole body was covered in sweat and his legs were shaking. The weapon he was using had an exterior energy source but that didn't mean that it wouldn't be tiresome to shoot with it for this long.

"For now? What does that mean? Are there more of them coming?"

"Awoo?"

Agni called out from behind with perked-up ears as he was sensing something further in the first and his master was able to finally notice.

"No, I don't see any in the vicin..."

"Boss?"

Before he could answer the question he noticed something on his map. A moment before it was devoid of any dots representing the skeletal monsters but now another one had appeared. This would normally be fine, one more skeleton soldier wouldn't change anything but this dot was a lot bigger than the rest, it represented a monster that was above tier 2.

This wasn't the only strange thing about it, the dot that was right at the edge of the area he could see stopped. It was standing on the path that the other monsters followed almost instantly after discovering it. The monster was acting strange and was probably not one of the lesser blazing skeletons. 'Did that Lich come out of the dungeon?'

Now, this was a dangerous predicament, if it was the Lich then he would be in a lot of trouble. While he was on his home turf this didn't mean that he could just take out a tier 3 monster by himself. The turrets that were firing even with a change in the mana pattern would not be able to pierce through the undead mage's shield.

'Or is it one of his minions instead? That would make more sense, why would it go out by itself without that many minions around?'

This was the more realistic turn of events, the dot he was looking at probably belonged to one of the obsidian skeletons. They were somewhat comparable to adventurers with lesser tier 3 classes of the same level. With his current assortment of defenses and his armor, it might have been possible for him to come out on top. The spider drones were still waiting for a command to attack as for the time being he had conserved their runes. Then there was also the ace in the hole that he had saved up for a fight like this, the experimental divine spells.

"There could be a big one coming, get ready but leave most of the fighting to me, and don't be afraid to retreat to the workshop if it gets past the wall."

“Shit, a big one?”

Bernir wasn't sure what to expect but if Roland was taking it seriously then it had to be a serious matter. However, a minute had passed and then another and soon a quarter of an hour had passed and no enemies were in sight. This finally caused Bernir to look to Roland who had remained silent for a while.

“So... uh... is it coming or not?”

“It seems to be coming here but very slowly...”

The monster was acting strange, could it have not been an undead? Could there be another tier 3 monster that had just walked into the forest for a different reason? This was a possibility but considering that there were other monsters slowly walking behind it, it was more probable that it was part of the undead army.

Soon it arrived at a close enough range for Roland to see it. He had used spells to enhance his vision to zoom in on the thing that had arrived and just as he expected it was a skeleton composed of black bones. It was the same mage type he had seen down in the dungeon, perhaps the very same one he had escaped from. It was probably not here to avenge its comrade that had exploded but it was also not here to attack him.

After it was discovered by Roland it continued up to a certain point until stopping. A group of around fifteen skeletons was together with it but they were acting differently. It was possible that the monster had some type of control over this unit. The black skeletons had shown a higher level of intelligence than the others, perhaps they could even act as proxies to their leader and command smaller groups of the lesser undead?

Soon enough before a fight could break out the monster turned around and left. When looking at the path it took, it was going back to the dungeon where they came from. Did this mean that the battle was over or was it preparing something?

“This feels off... was it gathering information for its master? Are Liches normally this intelligent?”

This whole scene left a sour taste in his mouth. It made it look like the monsters were just testing out the people outside to see how they reacted to the skeleton onslaught. If they were left alone for too long, then it was possible that they would try another assault but this time around they might come in larger numbers and with a plan...

Chapter 275: Weighing the choices.

“Lord Arthur, the monsters are retreating...”

“They are retreating?”

“Yes, Lord Arthur.”

“Why would monsters retreat from battle? Isn't that rather odd?”

“Yes Lord Arthur, usually undead creatures like skeletons don't have the wit or danger assessment abilities for battle tactics.”

“That’s what I thought, it must have been the Lich controlling them.”

“That is a possibility but Liches are said to be able to create high-level undead that have higher intelligence and are capable of ordering the lesser ones.”

“Didn’t the scouts spot a strange-looking skeleton among the others?”

“Yes, Lord Arthur, that one could have been capable of ordering them to return but it could also be possible that the Lich is somewhere close.”

“That’s troublesome…”

Arthur Valerian was sitting in the main guard tower where Mary was answering his questions. He had not participated in the battle but the tide of blazing white skeletons had actually made it to the gates. The foes were quite troublesome as conventional ranged weaponry didn’t work too well, arrows that weren’t magical wouldn’t have any flesh to stick to and poking holes in the bones was not very effective.

It would require quite the archer to connect with the monster’s magical core from within the city walls. However, Arthur’s forces had one ace in their sleeve, to combat the evil cultists they had been developing holy weapons. They had been mostly manufactured by the city Runesmith and were quite potent when going against these monsters.

The whole siege didn’t take that long, first, it started with many of the adventurers and dungeon guards fleeing back to the city. It started out small with a handful of skeletons but soon turned into a small battalion of around two hundred skeletal monsters trying to get it.

There was no rhyme or reason for this charge and they b-lined it for the front gate which was a hard point to besiege. The magical turrets that were installed played a big role in the defense as they were able to successfully bring down a large chunk of the skeletal monster charge.

Yet after the monsters attempted to climb the walls the defensive turrets started to have trouble with the angle of their targets. The soldiers had to poke the monsters away with their long spears while also barricading the front gate that was being pushed into. The monsters looked light but they had a surprising amount of power and didn’t tire.

This small city didn’t really have that many soldiers. The weapons that were assembled by the runesmith amounted to a little over a hundred. This left the three hundred remaining soldiers and guards with lesser weapons but enough to stem the tide. Soon the adventurers joined the battle and together with the guards were able to push back the maddened monsters.

The divine swords, shields, and spears were rather well-designed to go against these monsters. With a good poke of a spear tip and activation of the smite spells it only took one hit from a tier 2 class holder to defeat one of these skeletons. However these weapons had one large downside, they held up to ten charges of this spell before they needed to be refilled by the priests.

Luckily for the city, the priests were more than willing to combat the undead monsters. They had sent over their priests to recharge the weapons. They truthfully expected a bit more resistance from the monsters that soon retreated back towards the dungeon. This was at the same time as a strange black skeletal monster was spotted which was probably the one in control.

“So how you feeling after your first ‘battle’ little Lord, although I don’t think we can consider those lesser undead much of an army.”

“How dare you...”

“It’s fine Mary.”

The conversation that the two were having was broken by a large man appearing in the guard tower. The room they were in belonged to the guard captain but was now occupied by Arthur, his knights, and aides. Mary didn’t appreciate the nonchalant tone the guild master had but she could not really go against a tier 3 person. Her side lacked someone at this level which would make things problematic.

“Guild Master, glad that you came, I must thank you for your corporations, the adventurers were quite useful, please sit down I would like to hear your opinion about their strange behavior.”

“Aye, I see that you noticed.”

“Indeed, do you think that it could have just been a scouting party?”

“That’s unlikely, probably the Lich pulled its troops back out of fright, those undead tend to be very cowardly, it’s more likely that it will retreat to its lair and surround itself with more undead, perhaps after bolstering its forces it will make another attempt.”

“Hm...”

It seemed that Aurdhan the guild master didn’t believe in the undead uprising. It was more probable that it would start playing the waiting game. This would give them enough time to get a platinum adventurer party over for help. With them around and some help from gold ranks the dungeon could be taken back.

“But...”

“But?”

Aurdhan rubbed his chin before dropping his body on a nearby chair without really asking for permission. His expression changed to a more serious one as well as his tone which was not something Mary appreciated.

“There is a possibility of it being unique, the chances are low but it could be planning something, it’s already using higher-tier undead as proxies, this could become troublesome.”

“Then what would you advise us to do, Guild master?”

“You have two choices little lord, either we wait for the adventurers to arrive or you assemble a force now. I would advise against the second one, you just don’t have the manpower.”

Mary narrowed her eyes at the way that the guild master was referring to Arthur but couldn’t really find anything wrong with the tactic. Perhaps a large enough force could deal with the monster but a lot of lives would be lost in the process.

The city guards were not used to fighting in small spaces like in the dungeon or used to the hot lava as much as the adventurers were. It was probably crawling with the creatures along with a monster that

could create more of them without an end. While it would be best to take it out before the skeletal army was restored the lack of troops was apparent.

"I see, thank you for your insight."

"One more piece of advice before I go, you might want to visit our little runesmith, he might be of some help to you."

The guild master gave Arthur a little wink before raising his large body off from the seat. He was not really given permission to leave but Arthur didn't really mind. He knew that respect had to be earned and this was a chance. If he performed well then he might gain some of it from the guild leader.

"How dare he act this way in front of the lord? Give me an order and I will..."

"That's enough Mary, we need that man to protect the city, the black skeletons are considered to be tier 3 right?"

"That is correct..."

The cat girl's head lowered slightly as she knew that at the moment only the guild master would be able to protect the lord. She felt somewhat inadequate with her level which had been stagnating lately. She had focused on furthering her spy network and creating an information guild. Through it, she knew that there was potentially another person on the guild master's level but that one would probably not move without a hefty bounty.

"But why did he mention Wayland, could he know something about the Lich?"

Arthur stood up from his own chair and walked over to the window while posing the question to Mary. The two knights were outside the door while he and the maid were the only ones left now. Through this guard tower, he could see into the distance where the forest was and in it the runesmith. Judging by the fact that the skeletons came from the dungeon it was probably that they gave his associate a visit.

"We don't have much information yet, people had seen Mr. Wayland at the dungeon before the skeletons broke out, he had apparently given a warning to everyone before vanishing."

"So he left before it started, he must have contacted me at around that time... did he stay at his house while knowing of the outbreak? What was he thinking..."

"Mr. Wayland's home is very well guarded, there are magical devices he called runic turrets surrounding his home, I'm sure that he believed that he would be fine. There is more to it though, something about a hidden mine."

"A hidden mine? Are the dwarves involved with it too?"

"I regretfully don't have enough information, my people are seeking out the source of the rumors and I believe that we will have more information soon. He had been seen in the dungeon when the break happened and did help some dwarven miners escape."

"Is the union involved with this in some way...?"

Arthur murmured to himself while trying to paste some things together. Could there be more to this than just a random monster spawn? Did his associate or the dwarves dig it up somewhere, were they working together without him knowing? There could be many possibilities but he wanted to at least exclude that possibility due to the history between Wayland and the Dwarven Union.

“Very well, keep me informed and also contact Mr. Wayland, I think the runic devices he installed need some maintenance. We can use the crystal ball to call him over, could you fetch it?”

“Yes, my lord.”

Mary smiled while knowing that repairing the turrets was a great way of forcing the runesmith to come over. There was something wrong with this situation and it seemed that Wayland was involved with it. Her presumption was somewhat confirmed by the guild master that for some reason mentioned the man in question. It was clear that he knew something about this whole predicament, and his involvement with rescuing some miners was already known.

...‘What are those skeletons trying to do...’

Roland had some time to evaluate the situation after the monster had retreated. With the monitoring devices, he left by the secret entrance he could somewhat observe the situation. Judging by the dots there two tier 3 skeletons were guarding the entrance to the dungeon now. Around them was a large group of blazing skeletons as well, it was clear that they wanted to safeguard their only exit out of the dungeon.

‘Are they just protecting their lair? Could the Lich think that the entire dungeon is its for the taking? or are they preparing something...’

He had to reconsider his approach after this incident. The monitoring devices down in the dungeon didn’t reach far enough to make a connection to the lower dungeon. It was as if he was not paranoid enough and should have rigged the entire place up before this mess started. With his current map, he could see a few floors down and not through the entire dungeon.

This was enough to get an idea of the situation though and would probably need to reach the city. If someone decided to charge in at this moment without at least two tier 3 class holders around they would have a bad time against those two obsidian undead. The rest was spread out a lot more around the dungeon but he couldn’t really tell as the regular monsters would continue to spawn.

‘They are fighting with the regular monsters but the tier 2 skeletons won’t have problems with the tier ones ‘

Back at his place Bernir and Agni were still watching over everything. It didn’t seem that another charge would be starting anytime soon. Thanks to the monitoring system he would at least be able to tell if a larger force appears from the lower levels. It would be better if he could gain that information from the lowest level as that would give him ample time to prepare.

‘Going in alone to widen the network is probably too risky, not with those tier 3 monsters around...’

He wasn’t sure what he should do, the monsters here would be a constant danger to his home. There was one advantage that he had against them and it was this secret entrance of his. It led to the first floor

and could potentially be used for a surprise attack. The only problem was that he would need to give this secret away to the city lord and guild master.

There was potential in this secret route if they got some tier 3 class holders involved. Half of a platinum-rank party could sneak in through this way and attack the monsters from the back. It could help to lessen the bloodshed and give the people an entrance that they could control. The downside would be of course that they would need to go through his workshop.

‘Well... I kind of created this mess myself...’

Roland gave out a sigh, while he didn’t want to do it, revealing this secret could at least save some lives. This however depended on what the powers in the background decided on. The guild master from the adventurer guild was a shady character that also worked together with the thieves guild. Revealing a secret entrance to his home to him was a hazard, then there was Arthur Valerian that could just throw him into prison for creating a private entrance to a dungeon that belonged to his household.

‘I guess, I’ll hold onto this for the time being, let’s see what they will decide first, it should be about that time.’

After knocking his head against the wall Roland moved back towards his workshop. In his hand, he had a crystal ball that started to glow. It was the opposite one to Arthur’s and just as he expected the city lord wanted to have a word with him.

‘I should inform him about the tier 3’s ‘

This runic texting orb was just the tool that he needed to forward his findings. At least Arthur would pull back some of his scouts that would soon be ordered to gather information. The monsters might have been ordered to protect a certain zone so they might remain at the entrance even if they saw a person there.

‘Let’s see... Danger, two tier 3 monsters are at the entrance of the dungeon...’

It was a bit strange to send out a direct message through magical means in this world. Perhaps if he got past this event he could spread this technology through the entire kingdom. The military would probably be interested in instant transmissions of information between bases without the need to use much magic. For now they still mostly used mages or support tools for crystal balls.

While it was the superior way of talking between two individuals it was slower. There of course existed magical incantations that could generate letters to faraway places; they usually required specialized classes, rituals, or materials. With his technology, they would need to build a few relay stations to forward the signal. It would cost a bit but the almost instant exchange of information and orders could revolutionize the war machine.

‘He wants me to come over?’

After sending his message he saw an almost instant reply. It was the usual pre-programmed text that he had read through multiple times but this time around it carried a lot more weight. He knew that instead of a friendly business meeting he would have some explaining to do.

“Hey boss, is something troubling you?”

“Ah... I need to go to the city, the city lord wants to talk to me.”

“That pretty boy? Don’t worry, I’ll keep this place safe while you’re gone!”

“Woof!”

“Aye Agni, you’re helping too.”

Roland made his way outside of his workshop to give Bernir the news. While he didn’t want to leave the two here with those tier 3 monsters running around, he needed to answer Arthur’s call. Asking a noble to move to his location instead would be considered quite rude and could get him in a heap of trouble.

“Thank you but...”

“Yeah I know, if it gets too troublesome I’ll just use the escape tunnel, don’t worry, I like this workshop but I still like my life more.”

Bernir started laughing while hosting his weapon over his shoulder. After some repairs, the turrets were back in order and the heavy gun he was carrying around too. Roland didn’t believe that the monsters would move for the time being so it was time to give the young lord a visit and perhaps come clean about his involvement in this mess.