

Runesmith 278

Chapter 278: Spicy deal.

“So that’s what happened, that a higher rank dungeon would be under my nose, you say that the undead could have come from there or have been a triggered trap?”

“It’s a possibility, honestly I don’t really know, I have never heard of monsters being able to cross through unconnected dungeons.”

“That is true, never heard of an event like that happening before but we can’t count it out...”

Roland and Arthur were at the end of their discussion and he had disclosed most of the information. He didn’t lie about the Lich’s origins as he couldn’t truly know if the monster was the same one he saw on the other side of the dungeon. There was also a possibility of it actually being a random spawn in the dungeon or some kind of timed trap that was activated after he stayed in the mine for too long.

“I’ve heard of boss-rank monsters appearing when adventurers spend too long in a specific zone... but if it actually crossed from the other dungeon over to ours then it could be problematic... but also... a chance...”

Arthur at first seemed distraught by the idea of monsters ransacking his city but after hearing that there was a tier 3 dungeon hiding under his nose, he recovered quickly. Roland wasn’t sure how he gained the rights to this city but how he reacted made it seem that he wouldn’t lose any rights to the tier 3 dungeon even if it was found.

Normally a noble in a higher position than Arthur would jump in to take the place. A dungeon with proper tier 3 monsters was like a true gold mine. The materials that these monsters left behind could be made into true treasures. Even a simple bone from the Lich could be turned into a potent elixir or a strong weapon that could go against tier 3 individuals.

“You say that there were more than one of these tier 3 undead there? What rank would this dungeon be rated in your opinion?”

“What rank?... That depends if the area the mine connects to is unique or not... if it’s just a small zone containing a few tier 3 monsters then it would mostly be a B but if it’s more than that...”

“If it’s more than that? Could it be?”

“Yes, an A-rank dungeon.”

Roland noticed a strange twitch in Arthur’s eye. It probably took a lot out of this small-time noble to not fall off his chair. Gaining something like an A-rank dungeon next to his city could either be a blessing or bring disaster. Dungeons of this rank were quite rare, even in the whole kingdom they could be countered on one hand.

There was a possibility of one of the Valerian brothers trying to force their way into these lands to get to a dungeon like this. They probably wouldn’t be able to do it through legal means. The war for succession wouldn’t allow that, everyone was given something to start with and if they got lucky that was counted in. This however didn’t mean that they wouldn’t use underhanded means to get to him.

'If Arthur died then his brothers could add this land to their forces, putting someone from their side to manage it would be the next move if they couldn't just include it into their territory.'

This was quite problematic as most of the people that Arthur was competing with had access to tier 3 class holders. From Roland's perspective, it wouldn't be that hard to pay off a powerful assassin to get to him. There were some ways of getting a protective shield around him though, one through the same means as the assassin.

"...But there is another possibility..."

"Another one?"

He spoke up as in his mind there was another probability. It was strange that an A-rank dungeon was just hovering in this place without producing an exit. These strange underground structures wanted to be discovered. The way they always produced one entrance was proof enough. This one, on the other hand, didn't seem to have made one yet but it was already this rare, it made more sense that something else was happening here, it might have already had an entrance somewhere else.

"The S-rank dungeon in the middle of the island, this might be part of it."

"Mr. W-wayland you must be joking right? How could it be part of that dungeon..."

"Those kinds of Lich monsters do appear in that dungeon... could it be part of the infernal wrym maze? Wasn't there an incident a few years ago where some miners unearthed a secret passage?"

"T-that..."

Mary Chimed in from the side while Arthur slumped against the desk before him. This was no laughing matter, gaining access to an S-rank dungeon would be tremendous. What was an S-rank dungeon? It was one that actually contained monsters above tier 3. Only Orichalcum and Adamantium rank adventurers had any hope of coming out alive against monsters above that tier.

'That S-rank dungeon is said to not have been fully explored even after being discovered hundreds of years ago. What did they call the last boss there, Calamity Dragon, or was it the Nether Infernal Dragon?'

Roland tried to remember the records concerning the dungeon. In reality, people had given up on killing that monster and claiming the treasure it protected. After several Orichalcum and even Adamantium parties were wiped out by it, the consensus of the beast being too strong had spread through the whole kingdom.

The only possible way of claiming the last victory was a combined effort. If the Kingdom lent their best knights, if the Solarian church allowed their cardinals to compliment the Adamantium rank adventurers then it might be a possibility. However no one was willing to potentially give up their strongest fighters, it was just too risky. If they lost even one of those pillars of support for their faction it could be disastrous.

"You'll have to excuse me for a moment Wayland, this is quite a bit of information you have brought me."

"I understand but Lord Arthur..."

“You can just call me Arthur when we are here.”

Roland nodded as his being a runaway noble was somewhat known now. He had not mentioned his roots and was allowed to forsake his old name after answering some questions. The contract compelled him to prove that he was not part of any of the opposing factions, a spy from Arthur’s brothers or another kingdom. After confirming that his background didn’t really matter he was in the clear with Arthur and Mary.

“Fine... Arthur, I’d advise you to think about the hidden dungeon later and focus on the problem that we have now, first we should get rid of the Lich and then tackle the other issue. I’ll guarantee that unless you let someone else mine that area they will not discover the secondary dungeon, you don’t really even need to disclose it as another dungeon yet...”

“Oh? What do you mean?”

“How about, we just say that it’s another part of the Albrook dungeon? If you let me work on the entrance, I can create a permanent entrance.”

“That would give us time to explore it but for that we would need the guilds support...”

“If you are talking about that guild master, then he would probably go along with it.”

“He would?”

“Yes, that man’s greed knows no bounds...”

The image of a grinning bald Aurdhan appeared in his head. Roland had interacted with this guild master on a few occasions and he knew the man was always willing to try a good scheme. With his help, they could slowly examine the dungeon without news spreading. He had enough contacts to hire a platinum-rank party for such an occasion.

This plan that he was thinking was quite simple and would allow Arthur some space to breathe. They would explore the new part of the dungeon and see if it was a new A-rank or a connection to the S-rank dungeon in the center of the island. Even if it was an S-rank they could give it a fake grade with Aurdhan’s help. Roland had already tested it out and it was possible to force doors into this dungeon.

He would make it look like an entrance into an even lower level of the dungeon and not a separate one. Monsters not being able to cross between safe zones was a natural occurrence so the adventurers wouldn’t know any better. This would protect Arthur from his brothers going berserk over it and also from his father that might decide to take this area away.

The head of the Valerian house could consider his bastard son unworthy to monitor a new entrance to the most important gold mine on his territory. Instead, it could be considered an A-rank or a B+ for a while before its true identity gets discovered. The super dungeon was truly tremendous and this one could be a section of it that never was discovered.

‘That is if some random tier 4 monsters appear, considering that all of those skeletons were early level tier 3 monsters then we should be safe.’

Tier 3 started at level hundred fifty and continued all the way up to three hundred fifty which was the barrier of entry for tier 4. A person needed to achieve a hundred levels in a tier 3 class to max it out and

a minimum of fifty levels instead of twenty-five to attempt a tier 3 class change. Considering that leveling further became even harder it was truly a world-class achievement when someone made it to tier 4.

‘What will he do...’

There was a strategy to this meeting that Roland was trying to push. He considered Arthur’s motives before attempting this meeting and was close to certain that he would go along with this plan. Of course, if he wanted to play it safe and relax then the best way would be to just come clean and let his father take care of everything.

Arthur would probably be given someone to take care of things here while he just leisurely spent his time in the mansion. Another option was getting sent to another old city where no one would have to interact with him just as it was probably in this case. This was however something that went against the young noble’s goals. Roland wasn’t sure what it was about but his new partner in crime did have a chip on his shoulder. It wasn’t strange for the lowest on the totem pole to want to prove himself and this was a big chance.

“That is a valid point you bring up and something that requires some consideration.”

The young noble looked a bit drained, considering he just found out that he was potentially sitting on an entrance to an S-rank dungeon he was keeping it in. If he for some reason decided to give it up to people from his household then Roland couldn’t really do much. At least the contract guarded him against revealing his involvement in all of this. The only problem would be Arthur’s replacement who might not consider him as much of an asset.

“It has gotten late so it would be better if you head home for now. It would be also better if you remained behind city walls, we don’t know when those creatures might attack again or how big their numbers are.”

“Could I ask one last question before I leave?”

“Oh? What is it?”

“Do you perhaps know when the party of Platinum adventurers will arrive?”

“The guild master said that it will take at least a week for them to arrive or more, there has been an outbreak of monsters recently and most of those parties are preoccupied.”

“I see...”

“Don’t worry Wayland, those monsters will more than likely remain at the dungeon and considering that we are sitting on a potential A-rank dungeon here, losing a few weeks or even a month of resources won’t affect our bottom line.”

“That is true, I’ll keep you informed if I see the monsters move.”

“Ah yes, the monitoring system was it? That is certainly an ingenious creation, we will have to discuss its implementation in the dungeon after this little event is done with.”

“Of course.”

Roland replied in short sentences as always which made Arthur chuckle slightly. Their little daylong discussion was over and he had somewhat been able to get out of it without landing in prison. With the contract signed Arthur has somewhat proven his desperation which he could use now. However, this was just a small bandaid on an entirely bigger issue. A whole new can of worms could be opened now as he would have to put his eggs into Arthur's basket and hope they don't break during the bumpy road ahead.

'Hope this doesn't bite me in the ass in the future but it should be fine to just support him with some runic items at lower margins.'

That was his takeaway from the conversation that they were having. He would aid the young lord with his runic expertise and counseling while the other would see past the current events. In reality, this was something he was eventually planning to do. The tier 3 monsters next to the mining area couldn't be withheld for all eternity.

He just wanted to do it after he achieved his next class change to be in better standing. If that was the case the contract he prepared would have probably been a lot more in his favor but due to his blunder, he needed to give up on some things. While he wouldn't be giving up his autonomy Arthur would be able to call for him for help if it was needed.

'I hope that one clause won't bite me in the ass later on...'

Not everything went his way with the contract but it was already a done deal. Now he needed to focus on the present. He was already in town so before going back to his workshop he decided to pay Elodia and the orphans a visit. Bernir didn't trigger any alarms so it was probably safe for now. Later he needed to return him to his wife as there was no need for him to remain after the small attack was over.

'Arthur should be right, the Lich will probably remain in the dungeon and try to amass a new army but I'm not sure if it will stay there indefinitely.'

This was the big question, would that thing be content in remaining in that dungeon as a regular Lich would, or was it going to come out? A lot depended on the Platinum rank adventurer party that they were scrambling for and that was currently indisposed. Even if they gave out a mountain of gold, if the adventurers were busy then they needed to wait.

'I don't think Arthur can call up any of his brothers for help either, not after he knows that he is sitting on a gold mine.'

If Arthur had proper backing he would have enough power to call over some valerian knights. Within a few days, they would be here to kill the Lich that compared to the monsters inside the S-rank dungeon was a speck of dust. This speck of dust could be a potential giant wall that they get crushed by. Time was ticking and another wave of angry skeletons could arise at any moment.

"Hey."

"R...Wayland, you're okay!"

While thinking about the future he arrived at the home that Elodia lived in. She spotted him from her window and quickly ran out to give him a hug. This of course made the patrolling soldiers give them an

odd look as the city had been closed off for the time being. Only thanks to an identification plaque that he was given by Arthur was he able to move around freely, one of the new boons of their new contract.

“Yes I’m fine, just came to the city to check up on a few things but mostly you.”

Roland said with a straight face which caught Elodia a bit off guard. Considering that the city wasn’t breached it was obvious that everything was fine but other means of trouble could arise even without any monsters present. If the city remained closed off for too long there was a possibility of riots and pillaging. There weren’t that many guards around and they were already busy watching out for the possibility of a monster uprising.

It didn’t look so bad but since coming to this world Roland knew well that it was always quiet before the storm. If his life here taught him anything is to prepare and over prepare as much as possible because when it rained it always poured...

Chapter 279: Preparing for a skeleton.

“So people are already sneaking out?”

“Yeah, business is booming, some of those merchants are willing to pay top coin just to get out of here.”

Roland nodded at Lobelia, who was drinking some hot chocolate right next to him. Most of the orphans were tucked away in their beds which gave them the opportunity to talk in peace. After his visit with Arthur was over he decided to stop by Elodia's home to see how she was doing. There he ran into Lobelia who was his thieves guild informant.

It seemed that the underground guild wasn’t that worried about the angry skeletal army forming. To them, it was meaningless as the problem concerned the adventurer guild and the nobles. The only thing that affected them was the limited passage through the city which stifled their business.

The black market was in actuality occupied by a lot of regular merchants. They needed a way to smuggle in the commodities and this was usually done through regular means. This was a requirement as they still needed to hire adventurers to protect their wares from being stolen by bandits or destroyed by monsters.

After arriving in the city and usually bribing the gate guards they sold the forbidden loot on the underground market. Thus they were losing money by being unable to bring the product through the usual means. What remained were some of their secret tunnels but those weren’t really built in a way to support transporting of goods.

‘I guess some items are sought enough to pay a premium smuggling fee through a secret entrance.’

“Do they just prepare a carriage for the merchants outside?”

“Yeah, one of the fledglings will go to the nearest city to get one and it will wait close to the exit where the merchant can use it. It will be quite costly but these merchants are loaded!”

Lobelia continued to explain while he listened. Whoever had enough money could even be escorted out of the city under Arthur’s nose. Roland wasn’t sure how he should feel about this as someone that had signed a contract with the man. A clause, in particular, implied that he had to report unfavorable things

to the lord that he knew of. This would probably be one of them, luckily it was really vague and he didn't prod Lobelia for specific names to get anyone in trouble.

'I don't think Arthur can really do anything about it for now, not until he expands his forces and gains some actual power here. If he tried then someone might die, probably not him though.'

The Valerian name carried a lot of weight behind it. Even if Arthur started cracking down on the thieves guild and affected their bottom line they couldn't just kill him. At most they could sneak in and rough him up a bit as a warning. What was more likely to happen is for his people to be targeted. Those two knights and Mary were the closest people to him, it wouldn't be strange if the guild went after them instead to send him a warning if he ever crossed the line.

'Well, it's not strange for the city lord to have some kind of agreement with the thieves guild, sooner or later he will have to make some kind of decision.'

Arthur did seem a bit like the righteous type but considering that he was fine with keeping Roland around and lying to his people about the involvement with the Lich, he would bend the rules in his favor. The young man was like a politician, telling one thing to the commoners around him but working on multiple fronts behind the scenes.

'Not like anyone can gain anything from tying a noble to thieves guild dealings, perhaps one of his brothers could use it as a way to get him punished but gathering evidence for something like that wouldn't be easy...'

Perhaps in the war of succession pinning a crime on the competition could work. Roland had heard some noble sons being banished for working with cultists, opposing nations, or bandits. It was one way of getting rid of a pesky sibling during that competition. Nobles needed to seem righteous in the eyes of the commoners, their name couldn't be synonymous with evil.

"What's the guild's thought on the skeletons?"

"Not much, the guild master sent out an order to wait."

Lobelia shrugged while then quickly finishing up her hot beverage. Just as she did, Elodia made her way into the room. Everyone in this room knew about the thieves guild dealings but Lobelia was sure to not mention what she was doing around Elodia that to this day didn't like it. The fact that her younger sibling was still associated with the underground when she could just easily live as an adventurer didn't go well with her.

"Are you going to be staying?"

"No, I should get back to the workshop and prepare some things after signing that contract. I do need to follow it but don't worry, those undead monsters aren't very strong, I'll be fine."

Elodia frowned as Roland replied and got up to his feet. He had only come here to see how they were doing but then needed to leave. Arthur wanted to use that monitoring system of his and for that, he needed to get back to his workshop. If the monsters started moving he was obligated to use the crystal ball.

"I knew you would say that, here I packed you some food."

He was handed a small basket filled with treats that he quickly accepted. After getting used to Elodia's cooking he was at a point of finding most take-out food disgusting. This would last him only a couple of days but with Arthur's help he would be able to get through the main gate without an issue. However, if the skeletons attacked again he would be stranded on the other side. "Not going to try to stop me?"

He asked while smiling, this notion produced a pouty expression on Elodia's face and made her turn around.

"Would I be able to? You're the most stubborn person that I know, even Armand isn't as bad as you."

"Is that so, well I'll be sure to give you a call through the crystal ball, I've infused it with new mana and recharged the battery."

After a little hug at which Lobelia whistled from behind the two parted ways. Roland made his way through the empty streets and headed for the exit gate that he arrived through. For the time being he was able to leave but if another attack occurred then his only way back would either be by climbing over the walls or using the thief guild tunnels. The entrances to them were hidden out of sight and either behind an opening mechanism or a magical device.

'It would be unfortunate if that undead could get into the city through those. Monsters don't usually go for the hidden entrances, more likely if they continue to focus on the city walls and people defending them.'

The Lich was smart but he probably didn't know much about sieging a whole city. It wouldn't be that easy to break through reinforced gates and thick city walls. Without any strategy behind a charge, overwhelming numbers would be needed to scale that wall.

'They could have the numbers though...'

While returning to his workshop Roland went through his options. Now was the time if he wanted to abandon his workshop. Without any living beings around the monsters might even ignore the whole place if he turned off the runic defenses. That undead proved himself to be sensitive to magic, thus without any magic around it would head straight for the city.

'That thing was behaving strangely though...'

There was an issue that was bothering him. At first, he didn't think anything of it as he was trying to protect himself in the dungeon. Now on the other hand, when looking back the Lich's behavior had been strange. When it rose out of the lava pit, the monster went straight toward him, and the cannon blast.

'It was as if, it was only focusing on me... there were many miners and other adventurers around but it went straight for me instead...'

If he took into account that the Lich could potentially have it in for him. Then even if he left his workshop and stopped the mana generators the Lich would still give him a visit. The monster interacted with his golems before, perhaps it was already attuned to his runic wares as well.

'If that's the case...'

He stopped right before reaching his home. While the forest was engulfed in darkness the building he fashioned continued to be illuminated even now. The light would scare the weak monsters away but

beckon the one that could destroy it all. Would he be fine with the Lich coming here and turning the whole place upside down?

If what he was thinking was true then perhaps the monster was somehow affected by his mana. This theory was confirmed by the way it was able to shrug away anything that contained his own mana pattern. Only after he started shifting the frequency was he able to connect with the monster's body.

'That thing wasn't even shielding itself from that attack, it was convinced that it could just shrug it off.'

This wasn't an easy feat even for an arch-mage. Even if a person managed to crack another mage's mana pattern it didn't translate that well into combat. Even though this Lich was a creature of mana and perhaps the lack of a brain let it analyze the pattern better, it shouldn't have been that easy.

'Perhaps it has some kind of mana attunement skill? Or was it able to get used to my attacks when I was killing the other monsters?'

This left him with something to think about while entering his home. Agni had already been howling up the place even before he opened the door. When inside he could see the ruby wolf pressing his nose against the chain cage that needed to be passed before truly getting to his home.

"Don't be so loud."

"Awooo!"

"Yeah yeah, I know. I thought it wouldn't take so long but Arthur wasn't an easy opponent, he really went through that fine print."

"Awoof!"

Finally after opening the person-sized gate did he make it inside only to get tackled by the guard wolf. Luckily he had enough stats to power through the attack and not go down.

"Calm down, I'll give you your food now."

"Hey Boss, how was it?"

Bernir was there to greet him as well due to the monster problem he had remained here to contact him if any problem arose. With nothing happening though he was now free to go back to the city where his wife was probably waiting for him.

"Not that much, lets go inside first and I'll tell you everything."

"Aye."

After a moment he was back inside his home and Agni was munching on some regular monster food. Monster meat was the main cuisine that he liked to go through while mana stones were the appetizer. While looking at that silly dog face munching away Roland relayed everything he found out to Bernir.

"So everyone is safe then? Good."

"Yeah, you can head back to the city tomorrow just identify yourself as my assistant and they will let you through."

“That’s quite handy... but are you sure we can trust that noble brat?”

“No, but at the moment we will have to.”

Bernir nodded while getting the intent behind the words. For the time being working with the city lord was a must without him jail time was still a possibility. This was not something Roland was worried about at the moment though, instead his mind was wandering in a different direction. Would he need to make a stand here or would the platinum adventurers arrive to solve all of his problems?

‘I can’t risk going into the dungeon by myself to check things out... but there is not enough information...’

One of the issues was his not knowing if the Lich would decide to show itself to the world. Normally it should be content with creating a lair inside of the dungeon instead of heading outside. This was no normal Lich and it was possible for it to crawl out of there and when it did, it might go towards the place with Roland’s mana pattern.

‘That obsidian undead could have been a scout sent by him to find me... but if he throws all of those undead monsters at me then I won’t stand a chance.’

There were two tier 3 undead monsters standing guard in front of the dungeon. If the Lich went out and threw all of his forces at his compound then he would need to contend with multiple tier 3’s. While those black skeletons were at the lower end of tier 3, they were still formidable. Perhaps if one at a time came at him then it would be manageable but with an entire army of bone shields along with them, he would be in a bind.

‘Should I send my golems into the dungeon?’

His golems were getting updated with more intricate runic intelligence but they weren’t quite there. Roland didn’t believe that his creation would be able to conceal itself fully from the monsters inside. If it was discovered it could potentially irritate the Lich who could send another wave of undead monsters after him and the city. It was better to wait for the platinum team and perhaps work with them on the issue. As Arthur’s aid, he could easily join the party and help them map everything out to make their mission easier.

“Is everything okay Boss?”

“Huh? Yeah, I just need to get some sleep. You should get some rest too, I don’t think we’ll be getting any visitors tonight.”

“If you say so.”

The lights around the compound were dimmed down to allow the moonlight to shine through. When in his bedroom Roland continued to have trouble sleeping and instead used this time to monitor the monsters with the help of his helmet.

‘They didn’t even move a millimeter from their spots...’

They were just standing there as if they were inanimate objects which they weren’t far from. It was really true, after these undead were given an order they would just carry it out without thinking about

anything else. For now, they were in a defensive formation as if waiting for something and that something was causing Roland to be restless.

'Will that thing get here... and if it does can I do something about it?'

There were a few theories he was working with, the main one being that the monster was after his mana pattern. This he was almost positive as whenever that monster came in close proximity he went berserk. The same thing happened when it jumped into his beam while still on the other side of the dungeon as well as when it emerged from the lava lake. If he considered this one pattern of behavior then there were ways of preparing.

'I don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight...'

This was not the time to sleep, he needed to get ready. Just like before he couldn't just give up his home if it was attacked. Perhaps he was overthinking this all and the adventurers would solve all of his problems. However, he had lived long enough in this world to know that it was not good to rely on others. The fewer blindspots he had the better his chances were. Thus at around two in the morning, he made his way down to the workshop.

"Where did I put them... I know that there were a few samples left... shit did Agni get to them?"

When down in the workshop he started going through some of the shelves. They were filled with various colorful crystals and minerals that he sometimes experimented with. This time around his plan hinged on the particular holy mineral that Agni tried to much on whenever he had the chance.

"Finally got it..."

In a lockbox, he found a few small yellowy gems that were radiating a unique mana frequency. This he tried to copy with the help of his runic eyes skill that he was given at the end of his Runesmith Lord Class. While he wasn't yet successful with emulating the energy pattern for this project he didn't need to.

"Good... now to prepare a nice welcome for that Lich..."

With the materials in one hand and his hammer in the other, he moved toward his workshop. There was much to be done and time was potentially running out, when the next wave came he needed to be ready.

Chapter 280: Help not coming?

What could they be up to? Why didn't they try to retake their old territory? Were they planning something? Did the one that freed it run away and what was that great beyond that was outside? The Lich was constantly asking itself these questions while sitting on a throne made of bones that it created.

It had been a week since it had interacted with the strange creatures. Their uniqueness was not that they covered their bodies with a layer of flesh and blood but in how they acted. It was as if they were all singular beings working independently of each other which for this Lich was a strange occurrence. In its experience there always existed something controlling the various creatures around here, this would be it with the skeletons and the unfamiliar voice coming from the dungeon.

The monster looked at one of its minions, this one was quite similar in appearance to itself. The magical energies coming from it were weaker and the bones were black like coals but in essence, they were magic users. This thing could not function without getting orders, it was similar to the Lich before it was freed from the voice.

Could it be the voice to its minions like the dungeon was to it? That was the conclusion it came to and for some reason, it had an interesting thought. What would happen if it introduced that mana pattern that freed it to one of its minions? Would they start thinking for themselves just as it did and perhaps create an interesting result?

Its hand beckoned the skeletal mage over which instantly carried out the order. The Lich's boney fingers started glowing in a green color but something was off. Tried it did but it just couldn't copy the mana pattern that the armored creature produced. There was a mistake here, even with all the magical knowledge it had it could not fully reproduce it.

The Lich was confident in altering this mana pattern but could not reproduce it for some reason. It was as if something was missing, could that armored creature be unique in some way? The others that were examined by it weren't like this, even the monsters felt the same but something about the armored one was different. It concluded that it needed to study that armored thing in order to get to the bottom of this.

For this very reason it decided to prepare, the last time the being had managed to alter its mana to the point it couldn't defend itself. The Lich wasn't sure what had happened but this meant that it needed to be cautious, even of the one that perhaps had all the answers. Its lair had already been discovered and it was waiting there.

There was only one problem, the one that it was after wasn't quite alone. There was a larger lair with many others that it wasn't sure it could that easily conquer. There were strong ones there that its minions discovered from afar, these people could not get in the way of its pursuit of truth.

Thus it decided to hatch a plan, the one it was after stayed in one location and there he remained. The others were further away but these individuals seemed to help each other from time to time. The Lich couldn't pinpoint the deciding factor but there was a possibility that some would rush to help the target it was after.

It had stayed here for an entire week just for that reason. It had been quickly turning this whole dungeon upside down even to the point of hunting each and every unique monster it could find. The army had grown in quantity, quality but also variation. With its new replenished forces, it was feeling comfortable enough to leave, it was time to make its mark out in the great beyond.

The Lich's lower jaw started rattling as it stood up from the throne of bones. The staff made of bones went through a change and was now garnished with various magical stones. Its level had grown, its weapon was stronger and its forces could not be stopped. Now was the time to see what was out there, the world without a ceiling was exciting and it wanted to examine it all.

...

'That's about it, I sure hope this wasn't in vain'

Roland whipped some sweat from his brow after finishing up his preparation. For almost the entire week he did not sleep and tirelessly prepared for the coming of the monsters. This did not happen and now he was second-guessing his assessment. The implementation of his defensive strategy took a lot of time and material and would set him back by a month or two.

‘Well, better safe than sorry at least this has been a learning experience and these traps might sell for a bit if I can simplify the creation process.’

At the moment he was on the other side of the entrance to the tunnel leading to the inside of the dungeon. Now that he was in an agreement with Arthur he wouldn’t really need to worry about this coming to bite him in the future. Just as he had planned previously the adventurers would use it as a means of getting into the dungeon to flank the monsters guarding the entrance.

‘Well, not like I’ll let them into my workshop anyway.’

While he was obligated to guide the adventurers to the tunnel he wasn’t planning on letting them go through the workshop. Instead, he would temporarily create a second opening by magical means. The walls have been reinforced to take a heavy load from the outside but this didn’t mean that a person couldn’t get in if they knew that the tunnel existed.

A moderate amount of explosives would do the trick and so would earth magic or even a strong enough miner with a pickaxe. There wasn’t really anything preventing people to tunnel their way into his secret passage. He would of course be instantly informed if anyone breached it and the entrance had a reinforced door with some traps around it.

‘I really hope those platinum adventurers aren’t the nosy types.’

Roland was as paranoid as ever, his mind wandered towards getting exposed to the thieves guild. If those shady types knew about it they could try using it for themselves to either get into the dungeon or into his workshop. If this information landed in the lap of the wrong person he could be in potential danger. It was a potential entry point into his home which would probably require more traps after the platinum adventurers were done with their mission.

“Speaking of those adventurers, they should be arriving in a few days. Arthur must have offered them quite the reward that he shouldn’t be able to afford.”

It wasn’t known to him what the city lord offered to the high-level adventurers but they did make their way here in a speedy fashion. Normally it would probably take longer than a week for them to take a mission. Tier 3 adventurers had the leisure of choosing their work and most of the time this meant a thinning of the purse for the one offering the job.

Thus to get a whole team of four or five of them here would require a substantial bonus on top of the rights to the monster materials. There was nothing that Arthur would probably be gaining from this, the only thing that he could look forward to was the mining area and the hidden dungeon that the monster came from.

‘I guess we will go with my plan, should I start designing the dungeon door? Bernir could probably help me out with it.’

After all of this was over a lot of work would need to be done. The entrance to the secret area needed to be large enough for people and materials to get through. There were two options he was thinking about, one of them involved a lot of metal while the other stones. The first one would be costlier but it would be the safer one.

‘It might be better to work on it in the mining area than to make the parts here...’

The design needed to match the dungeon so that people didn’t see the ruse. The height would be around three meters while the width at least two. This however was not the main problem, that was the thickness. The whole gate needed to go through the entirety of the wall to block it from closing. He had been confident when talking to Arthur but he wasn’t sure if the wall wouldn’t start growing around the metallic parts.

‘If that happens someone might need to periodically remove the excess rocks from the entrance but bringing in more people in on the lie only complicates things...’

He could already see himself being ordered to go there and chisel on the walls while people weren’t looking. Luckily this was a mining area that would be mined and filled with workers. They also needed to think about a good way to get them there, going through the route he took wasn’t that great and required battling the dino boss each week.

The tunnel that led outside was also unfit for miners to go through but perhaps his mule golem could help out with that. It was already used to the path and was the perfect transportation vehicle for materials. The only other way was through the top but that spot would generate a swarm of worms if too many people ventured through it at once. Then creating a full flight of stairs that went into the chasm would be quite the costly endeavor.

“Hm?”

While thinking ahead to his future dealings with Arthur and the new mining team, he noticed something. His suit of armor picked up a change in the movements of the skeletal creatures that were defending the dungeon. For the whole week, they had remained in the same exact location and only moved when sensing a living person or other creature outside.

The city lord and the adventurers guild ordered everyone to stay clear of the dungeon entrance but that didn’t keep some people from endangering themselves. This however allowed Roland to measure the senses of the undead monsters. Their range of senses was at around six hundred meters and unless someone stepped into that range they wouldn’t react.

That is unless some kind of attack was started, then the monsters would crazily charge in the direction the attack came from. Roland wasn’t sure who it was but someone had shot out an arrow toward one of the monsters which pinpointed the trajectory almost instantly. Luckily even though the black skeleton gave chase, at exactly a kilometer away from the dungeon it stopped in its tracks and returned. This information he fed to Arthur as it would help them form a good counter strategy to lure the monsters out when the Platinum rank adventurers arrived.

“Did another idiot come or maybe a wild animal?”

These monsters also reacted to animals of specific dimensions. They would not go after rabbits or birds but if something like a deer or a wolf appeared they would give chase. Thus Roland went through his limited map area but could not spot any movement. All the wild animals that were in the area had already been killed or chased away. The stench of blood and decomposing bodies kept them from moving closer. Perhaps a carnivorous monster had wandered into their range but if it did then they were behaving strangely.

“They aren’t chasing anything, they are moving too slow... it’s as if...shit, It really was too good to be true.”

The strange movements could only mean one thing if there weren’t any enemies outside of the dungeon. It had to mean that the undead creatures were given a new order, they were on the move and this could be it. What he was seeing was the skeletons spreading to the sides and gathering at the exit as if forming a column. Then there were the ones that were in the dungeon, they were moving to the upper levels and they weren’t alone, a new wave of skeletons was coming.

“I need to contact Arthur.”

Quickly he ran to his communication crystal to send a message to the city lord. It was still unclear what was happening but an increase in the numbers of the undead could mean another dungeon break. This time around, there were actual tier 3 ones mixed into the groups which complicated things by a degree. All he could see were dots moving on the screen but that gave him somewhat enough information to paste some things together.

“...Wayland, is there a problem?”

“Yes, we have a situation, the monsters are moving and they are moving in large numbers.”

“Do you mean that they are going to attack the city again?”

“I don’t know, their number has increased and they are moving to the upper levels, there is at least a new tier 3 one among them.”

“A tier 3? Could it be the Lich?”

“It’s another one, it should be one of the obsidian ones.”

Roland already mentioned to Arthur everything that he knew about the Lich and the city lord also consulted with some specialists in the field. The skill that the monster was using was not yet clear but some kind of limit had to exist. Either there was a limited number of these black skeletons it could produce or a timer. It had been around a week since the dungeon was sealed off which gave him some time to replenish his forces. This couldn’t be helped as without a proper tier 3 unit to take care of them it was too dangerous.

“Wayland that’s enough, you should start evacuating to the city, it’s too dangerous for you to remain there.”

“I’ll have to refuse that order, don’t worry about me, I can handle myself.”

“For some reason, I thought you’d say that, stay safe then, and don’t do anything foolhardy.”

“I won’t.”

Roland could spot a small mocking smile on Arthur’s face which implied that he didn’t trust that statement.

“But what of the platinum adventurers, have they arrived yet?”

“About that... I think it will take them at least a day to get here, maybe even longer...that’s why you should...”

“I’ll be fine, if it gets too dangerous I’ll retreat to the city.”

Arthur finally stopped prodding and the conversation soon ended. Both men need to prepare for the oncoming incident. Arthur had the city to worry about while Roland had his workshop that he spent many years building up. He was certain that if the Lich crawled out of the dungeon he would make his way here. Even if he took Arthur up on the offer and hid in the city, the monster would come. Its interest in his mana was too strong and thus his workshop would be ransacked. He at least wanted to make a stand and all the weekly preparations were just for that reason.

“Luckily Bernir went to the city yesterday so I don’t need to worry about him.”

At the moment he and Agni were the only people that remained. While Bernir was helpful during the first wave of skeletons he wasn’t sure that he would do much if the tier 3 ones or the Lich came along. It could be the reverse and Roland feared that he would expose his back to the enemy if he needed to watch out for his assistant’s life.

“AWwwwo!?”

“I see that you know that something is wrong?”

“Woof!”

Roland’s hand moved to Agni’s head for a quick pet. The connection that he had with his tamed beast was strong and when the master was becoming alert so would Agni. He knew that there was some trouble coming and by the way Roland was acting it was clearly serious.

“Good boy, if we get through this I’ll let you eat some better mana stones.”

“!?”

Agni started wiggling his rump behind as he heard that he would receive some treats. Instantly he bolted towards Roland’s lookout gate where he and Bernir previously used to shoot at the skeletal monsters. There the wolf stood with his ears pointed in the direction of the woods, listening to anything that could be a potential enemy.

“What are they up to...”

Roland smiled at the way that Agni was acting but then brought his attention to his map. There he saw more and more dots appear on the screen. The monsters were acting strange, their movement was less erratic and more organized, it was as if this time around they were being led by someone...

“That thing is coming, I guess preparing for it won’t go to waste.”

