

Runesmith 281

Chapter 281: Spying on the enemy.

“Did I really have to come over here myself? I already told you that I can’t do anything about that Platinum team, they will get here when they get here and why are we meeting in this blasted tower?”

A disgruntled large bald guild master opened the door to the guard tower that Arthur was occupying. On the inside, he spotted the young lord already dressed in a set of armor. The long white hair went well together with the silvery armor that he was wearing. To the side instead of the usual longsword, a somewhat lavish-looking rapier adorned his side.

“What’s with you? Do you intend to use that on someone?”

“I hope not guild master, we have a problem, please sit down.”

“It’s fine, what happened? Are the monsters actually coming?”

Aurdhan after glancing over the young lord and his maid instantly knew that something was afoot. Normally a noble like this would only put on armor and grab weapons if someone was attacking the city, with how they had a skeleton problem this was probably the case.

“You are correct and it’s not just the weak ones, the Lich is among them.”

“Oh? That thing actually came out but how can you be so sure about this?”

The old man was more surprised about Arthur receiving the information before he did. The dungeon and everything around it was supposed to be his specialty. His contacts were supposed to keep him informed about the state of it from the outside. There were many people with advanced tracking classes and magical items that could observe everything from a safe distance but he did not hear any word from them yet.

Instead, this young man had called for him with the emergency runic device he was given recently. It looked similar to a crystal ball but only relayed short pre-recorded messages. It also changed color depending on the seriousness of the occasion. This time around it started blinking red which meant that he needed to ignore any other meetings.

“I’m sure, the information came from a reliable source, it seems that the previous attack was only a test, the monster is coming out in full force and we are looking at several tier 3 undead within their ranks.”

“Several?”

“We confirmed at least four and with the Lich that makes it five but there could be more and we don’t know how the monster produces them yet, he could be able to reanimate them instantly.”

“That would be a problem...”

Arthur continued to talk about the intel that Roland had given him. Liches required bodies to produce the regular undead minions, that was a truth known to everyone. This rule didn’t apply to the special summons that the black skeletons were part of. It was possible that after one went down the monster could instantly summon it back as long as they were close.

“We need to decide on a way to tackle this problem.”

Arthur commented while motioning with his eyes to Mary. The maid did a little bow before walking towards the entrance to this office. After leaving she soon returned with a man dressed in official soldier armor that was a bit more intricate than the others.

“Lord Arthur, you needed something?”

The man bowed lightly while also holding his helmet to the side. At first glance, the man looked to be at the age of forty. He had a well-trimmed beard that somewhat enhanced his jawline but even without it, he did look like a man that meant business.

“I’m not sure that you two have ever met, this is Guard Captain Edmond.”

“Think this is the first time we met, but I heard of him getting the position after the late captain was found embezzling those funds...”

Replied the guild master as he acknowledged the man’s presence. This man before him had spent some good years in the city and was an actual local. He was somewhat the second in command behind the old leader of the city guards. After Arthur arrived on the scene he was removed for taking bribes and hanging around the red light district a bit too much. He was on the level of a weaker silver-rank adventurer.

“Yes but let’s not talk about the past and focus on the future. We will need the adventurers to work with us again and your services might be needed, guild master.”

The guard captain seemed a bit dejected at the comment that Arduhan slipped in but was in no position to argue with a tier 3 class holder. Instead, he just stood there at attention as a proper soldier would and waited for an order to be given.

“So that’s what this was all about, you want me to fight that Lich?”

“I hope that it won’t come to that but you also must remember that you have clear duties to fulfill.”

There was an agreement between the kingdom and the adventurer guild. While the latter was not part of the official military and could operate independently there were times when they were required to take action. This mostly concerned official guild members like Arduhan here, he was required to take up arms against monsters in a situation like this. If he decided to run without confronting the Lich, he would be committing a crime.

“I know what I have to do, you don’t need to remind me but remember that I only need to act if the monsters actually make it into the city.”

“Of course, for the time being, we will still wait for that adventurer party to arrive, I just wished to remind you of the possibility.”

Arduhan gave out a sigh as he knew that he couldn’t really weasel himself out of this one. If he decided to abandon ship while being in his position the only place he could run to was the thieves guild. Outside of it, he would be a wanted man, perhaps a high enough noble could hire him as a lowly knight but he would rather go to prison than be forced to work as one of those.

“Hah fine, was this all you wanted to talk about, or can I leave?”

It didn't seem that the guild master appreciated the tone that Arthur was taking with him but he could also not refute the request. If the monsters made it into the city he would need to face them.

“Almost, Edmund here will act as a proxy as I'm sure you don't want to be called each time there is news about the monsters. For the time being the skeletons are gathering on the outside of the dungeon like this, Mary would you be so kind?”

“As you wish Lord Arthur.”

The guild master wasn't sure where this was heading. The guard captain or one of his people would relay the information and probably call for his help if the need arose. He didn't really need any outside help as he had informants of his own at various locations in the city.

This should have been the end of it but the woman brought out a strange rectangular square covered in runes. It was around the size of a chessboard and had four identical iron rods in each corner. They were less than half a meter long but thick enough to not wiggle around while the runic object was moved around.

It took a while to prepare this magical contraption. After putting it on the desk the maid had to bring over another item that looked like a black box with a cable sticking out of it. This cable was then connected to this board and only after did the runes start to activate.

“This looks like Wayland's handiwork.”

“Yes, he does give his works a certain flair...”

“Yeah, they tend to look like junk an old wizard flushed down their toilet.”

“Quite... but to his defense, I don't think he had much time to make this and at least when it comes to the magical effect, it's truly amazing.”

Everyone nodded as they looked at the rough shape that wasn't very pleasant to the eye. Most of the time runesmiths would spend some extra time to make their designs somewhat eye-catching and streamlined. This runesmith didn't seem that bothered by people scrutinizing some of his designs, if it did the thing it was supposed to do, then he was fine with it.

“What does this tool do? If those monsters are gathering outside of the dungeon I don't think we should be wasting time on some magical gadgets?”

“Don't worry guild master, this one could save a lot of lives.”

Finally at the end right before activating the device a map was placed on the flat surface and over the runes. Then when the preparations were finished the maid tapped a rune on the side which made the whole contraption glow in a blue color. Arduhan didn't think of himself as someone that was versed in magical devices so he wasn't sure what this was about. To him, it looked like a toy as it only produced glowing lights and nothing more.

“What is this supposed to be? A light box? What's with the round dots, I don't think I understand...”

“Guild Master, are you sure? Look at the map, doesn’t this look familiar?”

“The map? Isn’t that just the area around the dungeon, why would you place that map there... oh...”

“I see that you see it now.”

“Wait... are those supposed to be?”

“Yes, the smaller ones are the regular blazing skeleton and the larger ones are the obsidian ones. That’s not all, the most important thing is... how did he describe it... shown in real time?”

“Real, time?”

“Yes, as you can see some of those small dots are slowly changing location. We are seeing the true current movement of the undead.”

This magic map that Roland produced relayed information to this device in real-time. It did not use any holographic images nor was it created through crystals like the crystal balls used for talking. Instead, it produced low-levelled light spells in the shape of circles slightly above the map. The regular skeletons were shown as small blue dots while the tier 3 monsters were larger red dots. The image would be updated every so often to minimize the mana use.

“These three red ones are the tier 3 monsters, Wayland said that if the Lich appears its color will be green so for now we have some time. The blue light blends together due to the number of skeletons but at least we can see where they are gathering.”

“...Interesting.”

The guild master nodded while looking over the lights on the board. The blue dots kind of blended together to produce a blob of light. In three locations the three red dots were sticking out and the two monsters that were at the entrance still remained in the usual position with a new one moving a bit to the front.

“This does look strange, its as if...”

“I see that you noticed it.”

The two men nodded at each other while looking at the mapping device. The blue blob of skeletal lights was spread to the sides with the middle remaining empty. The two red dots that represented the obsidian skeleton guards were at the entrance of the dungeon and the third one was away in a straight line. It looked like the monsters were clearing a path for something or in this case, someone.

“This doesn’t look good, I haven’t heard of anything like this ever happening. What is this blasted Lich... could it have someone behind it?”

“That could be a possibility but for now we don’t have anything to confirm such a claim or anything that could interest a third party to go to these lengths...”

How the monster acted was quite unique. It was possible for an undead monster like this to have a powerful necromancer behind it. However, if such a person really existed then he would be doing a disservice to themselves. Why would they be making such a strange spectacle to attack the city?

Was this a smoke screen to get to something or someone during the chaos? This was a possibility but nothing of worth existed here that should interest a high-level tier 3 or tier 4 class holder. They couldn't just throw away the idea as the monster's movements were strange.

"I guess I'll look into this, I'll also see why those idiots are taking this long to get here."

Finally, the two men were done with their meeting and the guild master left. The main strategy was easy, they would wait for the platinum adventurers to arrive before confronting the tier 3 skeletons.

"Lord Arthur, are you sure we don't have to make preparations?"

"For my escape?"

After Arduhan left Mary and Arthur continued a different conversation. They were already looking at potential four tier 3 monsters and a large wave of undead. The people that were supposed to be here to clear them out didn't arrive yet. Everything could potentially go south at any moment, there was no way of knowing if the adventurers could even beat the Lich or if there was some kind of ploy involving a necromancer or cultists at work in the background.

"Yes, if the monsters get through the city gates, I propose that we use the escape tunnel."

"That won't be necessary."

"But my lord..."

Mary looked at Arthur who just shook his head and decided to not press this matter. She knew that if he abandoned this city during this period he would instantly lose everything he worked for. The war for succession was almost an afterthought as he had almost no chance of succeeding. If he abandoned the city he was given by his father however, this would end his already desperate struggle. This was his only chance and both of them knew it.

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"They are taking their time this time around..."

Back at Roland's underground workshop, he was looking at the crystal screen. There he saw similar dots as Arthur did before they were just moving a lot smoother. The board he made for Arthur was a quick implementation of his monitoring system that barely worked. It would be updated by another device that was here and every ten seconds an update would be sent out. One of the reasons for this was to give the city lord an idea of the situation and also so that he wouldn't need to make constant reports.

"There it is and he isn't really in a hurry..."

Finally, on the map at the furthest part of the dungeon, he could see a large dot appear. It was a lot larger than the ones representing the obsidian undead and it was easy to compare.

"There are two obsidian ones next to it... five could be the limit."

Five obsidian undead had now been identified by him or at least they were on par with the others. The dots kind of informed him about the level of the monster there but not about their true form. This meant that the city would be facing five lower level tier 3 undead and a Lich that had control over them.

“Why couldn’t those idiots have gotten here by now, Arthur should have given them enough of an incentive.”

The most stressful part about this all was that the platinum party of five was missing. Together with them, it wouldn’t be outlandish for them to achieve victory. They should have been at least able to contend with the five black skeletons.

The Lich could be taken out by the Guild master who was probably of a higher level than the average tier 3 class holder. Roland had even told Arthur to increase the reward which he would even cover part of. Being a Runesmith allowed him to earn a lot of money that he could use to take care of the blunder he was part of.

Now the monster that he helped create was coming here and he was already convinced about its destination. After it was outside it would probably detect the whereabouts of his home and either send its troops toward his location or perhaps do something a bit more drastic.

“I hope my preparations will be enough, otherwise ...”

While looking at the map he went over his armor once more. It was mostly the same model that he used during his gold rank quest. It had been repaired and the runes were enhanced slightly. The factor that made him stronger though was the higher level that he now had. There was one more thing he could do to help him go through this incident, a thing that he would rather avoid.

“It should be possible but it will destroy my future prospects and rebuilding this place is always possible...”

The runes on his armor started glowing brightly as he attached his helmet. A faint reddish glow filled the visor as he connected with the mapping device. It was finally time, the monster was going out of the dungeon and his next destination would be where Roland was staying.

The moment that he was trying to avoid was right around the corner. He prepared as much as he could and would not give up this place that he created without putting up a good fight. All the times he was forced to run had been slowly building up to this moment of stubbornness. He would not stand for it anymore and finally defend what was his.

Chapter 282: The Second Siege Starts.

The Lich hesitated, the stairs leading up to the great expanse were right before it. Its minions had already paved the way forward but it was still second-guessing itself. Something deep inside of its very being was telling it to go back and wait. The army it had now was huge but with time it could get bigger, was there a reason to rush?

Just as anxiety about leaving the confines of a dungeon filled its core, there was also immense curiosity about what was out there. This second feeling overshadowed its fear and made it take the first step up. It had been able to defeat its enemies before, it should be able to get through this again.

The fleshy ones that had run must have been trembling out of fear as they didn’t enter the dungeon at all. This was a confirmation of its power, that nothing out there would be able to stop it. There was nothing it should fear and thus it started walking slowly. Up and up the stairs it went all the way to the promised land that it had imagined for its short existence.

Finally, it was there, the monsters it created spread to the sides to make a path for the Lich. A gust of wind hit its boney face which it couldn't really feel due to its physiology. There was one thing that it could feel however, and this was the ambient mana in the air. To its surprise, the concentration was lower than expected. Considering this was the region that the armored one came from and the beam attack was quite concentrated it was a bit confusing.

This Lich was expecting a bit more from the great beyond, it was hoping to find a place filled with magic and answers. As it stood now there wasn't really anything here besides large green objects that were somewhat alive but didn't seem to possess any intelligence. All of them had a faint trace of mana but it was so minuscule that it wasn't even worth investigating.

What the monster desired was the place that the armored one came from. One of its creatures discovered the location it was staying but the Lich needed to make sure it was still there. For this reason, it moved forward to a place where it could use a spell. The monster army that it created started shuffling their feet to make way while also a large part was still walking through the dungeon entrance.

The monster's skeletal staff which was now enhanced by various mana stones and gems it found in the dungeon started producing a green glow. Normally a human mage would need to vocalize the magical words during spell casting, this monster was a creature of magic, and thanks to one of its skills it could forgo such a limit. This lessened the time required to produce the effect and countered most interruption attempts that regular mages were susceptible to.

Soon the result of the spell started taking shape. A large amount of green mist started swirling around the menacing Lich. This mist started taking shape of small skulls with glowing eyes. Within a minute a huge number of these swirling ghost skulls was hovering around the skeletal caster.

The monster raised its staff into the air and the dancing skulls followed after it. A sudden high-pitched screech escaped from each skull's mouth as they suddenly burst forth in all directions. Some of them flew up into the air while others sunk down into the earth while traveling in all possible directions.

Were it trees, stones, or even living beings, nothing could interfere with these green phantoms. They just passed through everything they came in contact with while constantly releasing a banshee-like wail. The Lich remained locked in one spot while moving its staff around, the spell continued to feed it information as it spread its mana senses into these fast skulls.

It could see it all, the whole landscape of this world revealed itself to it. Previously it could only contemplate the information its undead minions related to it. Their senses were dull and could not really interpret this world as well as their master. Before it was a large walled-out fortress, not even an hour's walk from this location. It was clear that the fleshy beings it met in the dungeon had their nesting ground there. If it could take that place over it would allow it to create an even better army.

This was only the tip of the iceberg as one could see many roads leading from this settlement. The monster knew that wherever there was a path that something had to be at the end of it. Even the dirt road leading from this dungeon brought it to that city. The world was truly vast and the monster could not stop shaking from all the possibilities.

Even though the city was revealed to it, this was not the first act it was going to perform. No, there was something else that it was targeting, a vastly smaller building about halfway toward this settlement. This

was the location that it needed to go, the being that allowed it to exist in this state was there. The mana pattern that was inside of it needed to be studied further and perhaps making that creature into one of its minions would produce an interesting effect, it just needed to know.

There was a problem as the skulls that it sent out started being snuffed out. When trying to pass through the city walls a strange energy dissipated them. The phantom skulls were able to relay a lot of information along with the mana pattern.

The moment it felt it the Lich felt disgusted, what was that dreadful mana, it felt like it was something that went against its very being. It felt instant animosity, this mana could not be left alone to exist, and anything that was able to produce it needed to die. It was as if a switch was triggered inside of its head that it almost failed to control.

This was not the only setback that it had noticed. The same energy existed in the lair of the armored one and its spell had been eradicated as well. To add insult to injury there was a large number of fleshy beings hidden in the woods, examining it and even hidden corridors that were filled with more beings.

The Lich was becoming conflicted, what was it supposed to do first? Should it go after the larger threat that was the city filled with strange creatures or do what it wanted and pay a visit to its armored benefactor? What if the beings from the city decided to interfere with its plan? What if the armored one decided to run to that city to seek shelter?

After the incident in the dungeon, it knew that it wasn't truly invincible. That beam of mana could kill it but only if it continued to not dodge it as previously. It had made a blunder of focusing on the mana pattern too much. If it increased the strength of its magic shield then even that beam wouldn't be able to make it through.

The decision was practically made for it as a familiar construct appeared near it. It was one of the blue armored insects and for some reason, it was generating the armored one's mana pattern. It was as if it was being beckoned there by it. Something inside of it continued to push it toward that direction. It was unable to keep itself from pursuing this truth that it had been waiting to unearth for its entire existence.

Finally, it had made a decision, it just had to go after it, there was no other way to scratch this itch that was forming inside of its core. It just needed to get to the source of that magic pattern. The city would have to wait for it but this didn't mean that the troops that it gathered here would remain stationary.

It beckoned the Skeletal mage over that was part of the obsidian ones. One last phantom skull remained from the spell that it made and it slowly faded into the skeletal spell caster. The moment it did their vision became combined and it could use the creature as a proxy. It would use this skeletal magician that was the closest to it in stature as a means to order its army.

Finally, everything moved, the monsters turned towards the city filled with people and the ones hidden away in the forests and below ground. While it contended with the armored being, its army would siege the city and keep everyone from interfering with the research. The many magical devices that were stored there would all be examined and the one that made them taken apart, in the end, it would consume all of the knowledge that were in its bones.

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“It took the bait...”

Roland had been surprised by a strange green ghost phasing through into his workshop. It was created by the skeletal monster and was potentially some kind of tracking spell. The moment it was here he triggered a lesser divine spell that was able to quickly eradicate this hex. At first, he thought the plan had been a failure but the monster seemed to act as he had expected it to.

He had sent out a spider drone into the forest to be stationed at the edge of the detection range of those other undead. It was then ordered to produce a magical effect that should have been detected by the Lich. Previously it had not been able to contain itself from charging toward his mana and this time around it was the same.

“Even if that was a tracking spell or detection spell it shouldn’t have been able to notice anything yet.”

There was no reason to panic yet, he had been making preparations for an entire week. The monster had a keen mana sense which was one of its biggest fortes but this he was going to turn into a weakness. This monster was intelligent and it possibly could learn from its mistakes. Thus if it was logical it would have probably sent its army to his workshop first before committing to an attack by itself.

That was the logical and better strategy when going to an unknown location. It had many disposable minions and no morals to hold it back. Yet instead of following that thought process, it started moving in the direction of the spider drone Roland left behind. Just like in the dungeon it gave chase and thanks to this he could move to phase two of his plan. Unless the monster split itself from the main forces he would have probably been forced to retreat but as it stood now his foolhardy plan had some merit to it.

“There is certainly something with that monster that draws it to my mana, now I’m sure of it but this doesn’t mean that it will make the same mistake as last time.”

While the easiest way to take care of it would have been the large mana cannon, Roland wasn’t sure about the validity of that approach working. Previously the monster didn’t activate its magical defenses and took the hit intentionally. It could have easily lasted through the blast because as it stood, the creature's magical stats were above Rolands.

This was quite a dangerous move and he knew it. The only reason that he was able to reason himself into this situation was that he was on his home turf. Here where his generators were along with the many turrets and other magical devices, he felt more ready than ever. It wasn’t as if he had never been able to defeat a monster that out-leveled him, one of his titles was Tier Breaker.

“It’s coming here but that small army is on the move too.”

On his map, he could see the mass of dots moving along with the large one representing the Lich. While it had increased its speed and was going through the forest by itself the skeletons were going through the main road. It seemed that they were going to attack the city while the master went after the spider drone that was now baiting it to the first trap.

‘They will be fine, right?’

This time around he was alone in his home with only Agni keeping him company. Bernir along with his wife and Elodia with the orphans was behind the city gates. The five tier 3 undead that he was seeing on the map were also heading towards the city that was still waiting for the backup it was promised. While

they could probably contend with the blazing skeletons the five obsidian ones would potentially produce casualties.

'At least one of them was capable of flying, it won't have trouble getting into the city but that guy should be able to handle it.'

"Awoo!"

"Well Agni, this is it, remember to keep to the plan, I won't be able to save you if something goes wrong otherwise, and just remember... if he gets too close, just run away."

"Awoof!"

Agni's ears stood up at attention and his tail started wagging. For a change, he would be able to actually help out during a critical moment. Usually, he was left behind or had to hide behind his master or sent away to hide somewhere to not get in the way. Now on the other hand he could actually help thanks to one area he was superior in, his speed.

"Okay, let's go."

Both of them sprinted out of the confines of the workshop where the larger map screen was. The distance between the dungeon and his house was around half an hour on foot. The monster had a faster traveling speed than that and it seemed impatient. Its forces were also moving towards the city which had to contend with its own problem.

'Would be nice if I could get that baldie to take care of this Lich for me, but no use even asking him.'

The whole thing was made on the assumption that the Lich would abandon its army and chase after the mana pattern instead. If he tried to explain it to anyone else then it would probably fall on deaf ears. There was also the problem of too many people being at risk if the guild master left his post and thus he was left with a small window of time to take care of this monster.

'I probably won't have much time before it calls for backup, I need to take care of it and get out of here if I fail...'

His presumption was that the Lich would give chase but this didn't mean that all of the monsters that were with him would just wait there. Just like that time the gargoyle variant saved the Lich in the dungeon he had to expect something similar to happen here. First of all, he needed to have his enemy drop his guard, after the last time with the magical cannon it was probably at least slightly weary.

"Okay Agni, remember what we practiced, lead it through the route and use the trees."

"Woof!"

Roland wasn't sure about this but he was unable to create a golem that was near the speed of his ruby wolf. What he needed to do was lure the monster towards his house but through the zones that he had prepared a nice welcoming. As it stood now the golem that was baiting it here would be caught up to around the halfway point towards the destination, from that point forth it would be up to Agni to get it here where he was waiting and the final trap awaited.

'I wonder how those guys are doing, those monsters are acting a bit strange this time around, it's as if they noticed something... wait isn't that the location of that tunnel?'

While Agni was going for his designated spot Roland took time to look at the situation. He could see three of the tier 3 undead going towards the city by following the main road. The two other tier 3's on the other hand were going in different directions and it wasn't his house. One of these locations contained an entrance to the thieves guild that he actually knew about but wasn't available for merchants like him to use.

'Could that spell have revealed some of the hidden locations?'

Now, this was quite the predicament. The thieves guild tunnels went under the city. Even if the wall held out it would be meaningless if the two undead monsters went through the tunnels and sprung up inside the city. Roland quickly sprinted back to his house where the crystal ball was connected to Elodia's house.

'Shit, Lobelia better be there... I should also probably contact Arthur, maybe he can get something done...'

His plan involved taking the Lich on a hike through the forest and during that time the monsters would surely attack the city. Now with the threat of them getting into the thief guild tunnels, everything got a lot more complicated...