

## Runesmith 283

### Chapter 283: Second Siege.

“Woof!”

A strange crystalized creature appeared before it. The Lich had seen something similar but not quite as large down in the dungeon it stepped in. Normally seeing this creature before him wouldn't be a problem, it didn't pose any type of threat to it. One well-placed spell would incinerate most of it on the spot. However in this case, there was something this creature had, a strange magical plate of armoring was around its body.

The monster was drawn to this as it was radiating the mana pattern of the armored one. Was it possible for there to be more beings with this unique mana pattern, the Lich didn't think so. There were two mana patterns mixed here one belonged to the ruby wolf and the other to the magical armor it was wearing. It had seen its target use magical gadgets before thus it had to have been made by it, this was a certainty.

A few moments ago it followed the beacon of another metallic creature that looked like a spider. It was similar to the one it captured and destroyed in its original dungeon. Catching up to it wasn't that hard but after disabling the blue spider it was introduced to this wolf creature. It gave chase due to the mana pattern but this time around it found itself not being able to catch up, the monster's running speed was slightly above its capabilities only when activating several hastening spells was it able to start catching up.

It didn't have much time before but it remembered this red monster, it was at the side of the one it wanted to capture and perhaps was also part of the puzzle. While chasing it down the mass of trees it pointed out with the staff and began the silent chants. Soon a mass of translucent green chains shot out to entangle the escaping beast. Regretfully, the red creature ducked behind some trees and rocks that were entangled instead. The chains were able to tear through this blockade but lost enough momentum for it to get away and so the chase continued.

This environment was working against it but it wasn't that worried. It was able to moderately gain some ground on the wolf creature that was shining brightly. The wooden splinters, dirt, and smaller rocks were already hitting the one that it was chasing. Only thanks to the blue mana shield around its body was the beast able to remain unscathed. This shield was also the main reason the Lich was giving chase as it had the unique mana signature it was after.

With annoyance, it moved to the side as it detected a trap before it. With a wave of its staff the area was instantly destroyed and the red wolf gained some ground. This was the main problem with it not being able to catch up to the lesser-leveled thing. From time to time it would encounter strange traps. Sometimes it was pieces of paper attached to trees. On other occasions, some metallic objects were buried shallowly with the dirt still fresh over them.

Its opponent was clearly trying to blow it up but the Lich was confident in its capabilities of detecting everything. The mana sense it possessed allowed it to pinpoint the locations of all these magical traps and either disable them or evade them. It was pointless to put things like these in its way as it concluded that an explosion of a magnitude like that would not harm it sufficiently enough to kill it.

This cat-and-mouse game would come to an end, then the red thing would be in its grasp. The metallic armor it was wearing would be used for more research and afterward, it would catch the thing that created it. Everything that was related to this magical energy that gave it freedom needed to be investigated.

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“They are here, archers get ready! ... Now!”

A salvo of arrows shot up into the air that produced a nice arc. When descending the wheezing sound was interrupted by something like glass shattering. This was soon followed by sizzling as if someone was cooking some stake on a pan filled with oil.

“It’s working, prepare the next one!”

An army of white skeletons with flaming skulls was upon the city. They charged with their boney swords and shields raised with no care for their safety. Their charge was interrupted by a mass of arrows that had small bottles attached to them. These when shattering emptied the blessed holy water onto the unholy monsters causing their bones to sizzle and their flames to die out.

The moment the monsters were in range the barrage started but regretfully the holy water wasn’t cutting it. The monsters halted for a slight moment but then continued on with their charge. It did produce a bit of damage and placed the monsters under a debuff but it was not enough to kill them. It was just an appetizer before the last hit that was delivered by the magical turrets.

These runic devices were able to shoot out concentrated arrows of mana at the monsters at a high rate. During the previous attack they started faltering but this time around they had multiplied. Due to the monster's inability to strategize, they continued the assault mostly from one side. The turrets that were placed at the other gates and walls were carried over and installed at the side where all the action happened.

A rain of blue magic started raining down on the monsters when they got in range. With the drop in speed due to the holy water, they were easy targets for the automated weaponry, and the ones that made it through were picked off by archers from the adventurer guild. A joint defense was established with a mix of adventurers and guards.

“My lord, the skeletons have been successfully stalled but...”

“But?”

“We have spotted three large black skeletal monsters approaching, they seem to be led by a skeletal mage...”

Arthur was there with everyone, in his hand he had a magical spyglass that he extended to take a look at the situation. Just as the guard captain said he could see three ugly-looking large black skeletons. One of them looked like it belonged on a primate, one was smaller and was holding a staff while the third was more beastlike and walked on four legs. These were the main problem that the city would be facing, tier 3 monsters.

“Continue with the ranged combat, don’t let them enter the city...”

Arthur gave out the command and glanced towards the side. There he saw a map filled with blue and red lights. His gaze traveled elsewhere, to where a large green dot was along with a smaller red dot behind it. The pair were going in a different direction than this army, where Wayland the Runesmith had his workshop.

“Weren’t there supposed to be five of them, where did the fifth one go?”

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“Agni is managing... luckily those agility buffs are enough to keep a safe distance from that thing.”

Roland was looking at the two dots on his helmet's inner screen. A blue one represented Agni who was running away and a large green one the Lich that was following behind him. After the monster caught up to the spider drone his tamed beast arrived at the scene. Thanks to the armor that Roland made he was giving off his mana pattern. This was enough to pique the monster's interest and follow after the runaway wolf.

To make sure that the Lich didn't use some kind of catching spell he set up some traps. With people forced away into the city, he had no trouble with placing various mines and bombs everywhere. This did the trick as the Lich's speed was a bit higher than he expected. Even with Agni using the buffing spells the two were very close. Luckily the monster was a caster so even with the tier 3 multiplier its speed was comparable to a tier 2 monster.

However, the traps weren't only to slow down the monster they had a different use. All of them were placed mostly out in the open with a few being harder to spot. Roland wanted the monster to actually discover all of them before getting near them, it was part of his plan that could misfire if the monster was too guarded. The Lich needed to feel superior and be convinced that it could discover any hidden magic that could hurt it.

‘It took a while to get here, how is the state of the city?’

Roland with the help of Arthur who allowed the placement of his mapping devices closer to the city could now watch what was happening there. It seemed that while he distracted the Lich here the offensive against Albrook was in full swing. This is not really something he had planned for as his intention was to lure the Lich here and make him forget about that large army that it created. His opponent wasn't in as much of a berserk state as he had hoped for but at least the army wasn't going after him.

‘This wasn't quite as I'd hoped it would go...’

Informing Arthur about the way the Lich acted went around his mind but he decided against asking the noble for help. First of all, he wasn't sure if there was any aid that he could get from that side. Perhaps if someone like the guild master made a move it would be different but it seemed that baldy didn't want to commit. That would leave him with some low-tier 2 soldiers and perhaps Mary that could be useful. With all the bombs around these people would be more of a hindrance than helpful.

‘I also didn't expect those monsters to charge straight for the city instantly.’

Roland expected the Lich to go towards the mana signature in a frenzied state as before. While this happened he also expected his army to mostly follow behind him. After the detour through the forest,

the slower skeletons would naturally fall behind to give him some time to tackle their big boss. If the Lich was destroyed the whole army would instantly cease to exist, taking out a Lich was always the fastest way of tackling such a matter.

‘They should be able to last out for a while, right? I don’t like what those two obsidian ones are doing... but I should probably start worrying about myself, if I can lure it there then this whole shitshow will be over.’

While he did keep his eyes plastered to the green dot on the screen he didn’t like where one of the red dots ended up. It ventured off the screen in a different direction than the main army. The last thing Roland could see was a smaller battalion of blue dots following it. Arthur should have been able to see what was happening there so it was up to his decision-making skills to do something about it.

When going back to his map he could see the green dot approaching at a steady pace. In less than a minute his foe would be here. Previously he was able to defeat monsters or people above his level. However, what was different all those times was that his enemies were not proficient spell casters. Each time he could somewhat close the gap with his runic spells which were a game changer.

The Lich on the other hand was a capable magician that was able to shield itself from harm. A battle between mages mostly ended in the favor of the one that could last out the longest in an exchange. Roland prided himself in a deep mana pool and a lot of resourcefulness but he wasn’t fooling himself into believing that he would be able to win a spell-slinging contest against a tier 3 monster like this.

Perhaps his prestige class gave him something to tighten that gap but there was another problem. The monster was capable of producing tier 3 spells but he had no true greater runes to contend with those. His best attempt was the massive mana cannon that would break down after just a few shots. To contend with something like this he would need to be able to implement such spells into smaller weapons like his armor or hammer, otherwise he stood no chance.

“AWooo!”

“Here they come.”

Finally, in the distance, the figure of a panicking ruby wolf was seen by him. Behind him following an explosion was an angry-looking skeleton surrounded by green flames and holding a staff. It was wearing a loose-fitting black robe and clearly meant business.

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“Did you hear something?”

“It’s probably those skeleton bastards running around. What are you scared of? Just let those noble fucks do their job, if we’re lucky we can get some of those bones for ourselves, I heard they go for a lot these days.”

“Why would I be scared? Fuck off.”

“Haha, you are, aren’t you? Just don’t piss your pantaloons, it already stinks in here.”

Two men with yellowish teeth were arguing with each other. One of them was mostly making fun of the other while sitting around in an empty tunnel. The only source of light here were the two torches on

each side. Both men looked to be bored with nothing much to do than look at some tree roots and bugs crawling on them.

“Why are we even here? No one is going to use this passage with those damn skeletons up there?”

“That’s true, we could be getting drunk at the pub instead.”

“Yeah, some of those new girls there are worth every silver piece.”

“Hehe, did you see the size of those... wait, did you hear that?”

“Huh? Stop trying to scare me, you idiot.”

“Shut up, be quiet...”

The man shouted out while placing his hand on the wall. This tunnel hadn’t been here for long but no one that didn’t belong to their faction had been able to discover this entrance yet. The man activated one of his detection skills to feel the vibrations of the earth through which he could determine if a foe was close by.

“Something is there...”

In a hushed tone, he whispered to his ally that knew that it was no time to ask stupid questions. Both of them held their breath and were quick to go towards their weapons. Normally nothing should be able to detect their presence even if they were loud, sound should be not something that escaped this tight cavern they were in. However, to their dismay, a strange rumbling sound entered their ears and was followed by the movement of tree roots.

“Shit, how is this possible... this isn’t even a real entrance...”

Both of the men jumped back in horror as they saw a whole tree being ripped out of the ground. This was a hidden entrance to the guild that was mostly used by their guildmates. There was a secret opening that would let one person slip in through the tree down here. If a person didn’t know how to contort their body right they would normally get stuck there. It was mostly used for dumping letters and secret orders for the thieves instead but now the whole entrance was becoming wider.

Soon the two men felt a draft take over this place. The tree that connected to this tunnel was just pulled out by what looked to be a black skeleton. This monster’s eyes were on fire and it didn’t come alone. Behind it, a large number of white skeletal creatures were making clattering sounds with their jaws.

“Fuck!”

The thieves screamed in shock while backing away. In one of the man’s hands, an oval-shaped item appeared that was quickly infused with mana. On the surface, a rune started to shine in a blue color before quickly going orange. Quickly the magical item was thrown at the monster still holding on to the tree to generate a large explosion.

“Run! We have to inform the guild...s..shit...”

The man that threw the bomb jumped back to save himself from the explosion. When he was about to turn towards his companion that was also bolting away he felt a sharp pain fill his entire chest area. There he saw a large black hand filled with claws going through it.

“I... t-this wasn't suppose...”

In a last attempt of defiance, the man activated all the magical bombs that he had on himself to produce a cave-in. The explosion instantly filled the whole place with rubble and allowed the other man to quickly escape. Now it was up to him to inform the others of the skeletal infestation coming their way...

#### **Chapter 284: Breach.**

“Whose idea was it to not place traps in the tunnels?”

“Uh... guild master you said that we should focus on making them sturdy enough first...”

“...”

An uncomfortable silence filled the room as a bunch of tier 2 thieves were looking at the cloaked figure shrouded in mystery. The person they were looking at was the thieves guild master that didn't really show up around this place that much. Now that there were skeletal monsters going through the underground tunnels there was a problem.

The room contained most of the thief guild leaders in this city and the person leading them. This woman who no one knew the true identity of was sitting at the end of the table where these ruffians gathered. On the sides of this table were the people she was supposed to be responsible for and now she might even be forced to act.

No one in this room knew that the guild master was part of the red light district. That persona to them was just one of the Brothel owners. There were several other madams like her out there and no one expected this one to be an actual tier 3 class holder.

To the right side, a large bald man that looked somewhat similar to the adventurer guild master was sitting. His whole body was covered in various beast tattoos with not much space being left for his actual pale skin. This man was responsible for the muscle portion of the city underground and also for the protection of their guild-led establishments.

On the other side, a man of a feeble stature and boney fingers was sitting. His face was covered by a mask that looked like a snake with small slits through which his yellowy eyes were barely seen. In one of his hands, he had a short dagger that he continuously flipped around with quite skillful movements. His body was covered with a dark green robe under which no one was really sure what was hidden.

Two chairs to his left was a rather voluptuous lady whose face was covered up with ample amounts of makeup. Behind her stood two large men wearing tailor-made suits that made them look quite professional. Right opposite them was a man wearing a long coat with a large cigar in his mouth. What made him stick out was a large horizontal scar running all the way from his upper cheek to the other one while going through the middle part of his nose.

“Wasn't this supposed to be a meeting with the inner members only? Who let those two bozo's in here?”

“Mr. Ivor, I’m just a defenseless woman, I need my boys to protect me.”

“I wasn’t asking you, who...”

The man with the large scar leaned back while scoffing at the woman. She in contrast to the others possessed no real combat class worth mentioning. Without the guards behind her, it wouldn’t be hard for any one of these thief guild members to kill her in one swift move. Before he could finish the sentence though the lanky man with the mask flung the short blade in his direction. It embedded itself in the table right next to where Ivor was resting his hand.

“Show the Madam some respect, it’s thanks to her girls that your gambling dens even earn us any money.”

The two men on one side of the table started to get up from their chairs. However, all of them stopped in their tracks before even being able to fully stand up. Everyone felt as if there was a hungry beast looking at them. They turned towards their guild master that was just sitting there without saying anything. They didn’t need to vocalize their dissatisfaction as the group of killers here instantly knew that if they continued like this, their life could be over.

“...”

A silence fell upon the room as the four inner guild members held their tongues. They could not risk offending the guild master that they didn’t even know the face of. Information was the key to any assassination and they lacked it. While their leader could easily reach their homes at any point in time they would not be able to retaliate. Their identity was unknown to them and the armor they were wearing could fit any gender.

“Viper, tell me what we can do to remedy this situation.”

The man with the snake mask quickly jolted his head toward the guild master. He was responsible for everything revolving around information in this city. After the skeletons made their way inside it was up to the scouts and assassins from his side-faction to produce all the info about this incident.

“Of course, guild master, we are looking at infiltration from multiple entrance points.”

“Can’t you just close the tunnels?”

Asked the guild master in a menacing voice that didn’t seem to belong to a human. Everyone was sure that they were using some kind of voice masking device at this point but were unable to comment on it.

“Regretfully the tunnels were still fresh and the contractors didn’t have enough time to prepare...”

The thieves guild in this city was still somewhat new. These tunnels needed to be first cleared out and reinforced so they wouldn’t collapse on their clients and guild members. The funds required for this were fleeting and in this case needed to be siphoned into different projects first. This left some of the tunnels without proper mechanisms that would collapse them onto anyone that dared to enter.

“Hmm...”

The guild leader didn’t answer as they murmured to themselves. Most of the initial funds went into digging up the underground and working with the black market merchants. Then another load needed

to be injected into the city officials. Bribing them allowed the guild to function without getting in trouble with the law and also left them drained.

Usually, proper large-scale guilds would have various ways of taking care of situations like this. They on the other hand didn't have any stop gaps nor could they blow up the tunnels from a distance. At most they could quickly gather some explosives in the hopes that it would be enough.

"They are still only skeletons, what's the problem is the guild only made of useless good-for-nothings?"

"The quality of our men is indeed not great..."

The man with the snake mask looked towards the large bald man that quickly got annoyed. He slammed his fist down on the table which almost broke under the pressure.

"My men aren't the problem, it's that damn tier 3 skeleton, guild master you must..."

The man looked at their leader with furrowed brows but quickly turned his head away. To him the only way of contending with the monsters was through pitting a tier 3 class holder against another one. Here only their leader was at this tier and if the skeletons continued to push toward their inner sanctum a lot of money would be lost. Restoring the entire underground hideout along with their black market would be quite costly. Not something this guild could afford and the guild master knew it.

"We can't let this affect our bottom line...fine then, tell them to retreat if they don't want to die, you have ten minutes."

The figure cloaked in black answered briefly before standing up from their spot. Soon they faded into the shadows of the back room without making a sound. Only after half a minute had passed did the four thieves here decide to speak up.

"My my, the guild master will make a move themselves? Such a shame that we won't be able to see it."

The madam stood up from her chair while her guards surrounded her. Everyone here was interested in the capabilities of their guild master. The tier 3 monster that was in the tunnels was the perfect opportunity to see what their leader was capable of. In a situation like this, it would however be somewhat difficult. Then there was also the fear of them being instantly killed if their leader discovered them peeking.

This hidden leader was well aware of all of this as she hid away from their notice. She had never actually left the room but just dropped her presence with the help of one of her skills to such an extent that they couldn't tell that she was still there. There were two feeding factions in this city with her in the middle trying to not allow one to get ahead of the other. If she didn't act too many people would die which would weaken one of these sides. A sense of equilibrium needed to continue for this underground business to continue working and for that she needed to act.

"Why is everyone so useless around here..."

After the room was cleared out she was finally able to speak out. The persona that she built up here was meant to act as a protective shield. It was certainly working as no one dared to go against her orders or voiced their grievances concerning the way she led this guild. For this to continue though she needed to put herself through situations like this one.



“Would be nice to have some competent attendants.”

Her biggest issue with this remote region was the lack of workers. The low-ranked dungeon in this region wouldn't allow her to interest any potential employees. She needed someone to take care of situations like this for her as each time she acted there was a chance that her secret could be revealed. Her situation was complicated so the way she really looked needed to remain hidden otherwise running would have been the only thing that was left to her.

The ten minutes she gave the thieves should be enough for them to clear out, if not then regretfully some of them might have to perish. This kind of risk was something that she was willing to take as more than keeping this place afloat she had to keep her real identity hidden. For that reason she could not allow anyone to be left alive that witnessed her true form, which was a requirement to clear out the passageways.

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‘Lobelia should be safe at the orphanage but I'm not sure about those two idiots...’

Just as Agni appeared before him Roland recalled the message he sent to Elodia's home. He knew that the Lich had discovered the hidden tunnels and after seeing some of the skeletons moving to one that he was familiar with it was confirmed. Roland was more worried about the two people that hung around Lobelia, they were actually quite low on the totem pole and may have been ordered to watch over some of the tunnels.

‘I can't worry about others now, it's here.’

“Woof!”

“Agni, get inside.”

Now that the Lich was this close there was no reason for Agni to conserve his mana. While the skeletal mage was around the same speed when going all out he was faster. The armored red figure of the wolf covered in rubies became a blur as he accelerated to reach his master at an alarming pace. Behind him a series of explosions caused the monster to not be able to continue with its chase just as before.

“You did well, now get back I'll take care of the rest.”

“Awooo...”

Agni's muzzle was open wide as he continued to pant. He had really given his all during the game of tag around the forest. He wanted to do more but was also aware of his shortcomings, remaining at the side of his master would only slow him down. The plan was not over yet so the only thing Agni could do was replenish his stamina and wait for Roland to give him an order.

‘Let's assume manual control first.’

The walls to his home were high but this monster here knew the levitation spell. It would be useless to assume a defensive position behind them. Instead, his first attempt would be through conventional means using superior firepower. Four turrets and another four spider drones looked toward the emerging skeletal lord. Its body was shrouded in a strange layer of energy which was a superior version of a mana shield.

‘A tier 3 spell, probably a mystical mantle spell.’

Roland could tell that the Lich learned a thing or two after their first confrontation. In the dungeon when it tried to dive at him, the monster wasn’t even trying to protect its body. Now it was using a superior shielding spell that allowed a lot of free movement to the caster. Other shielding spells usually formed a circular shield in front. This usually forced the magician to at least keep one of their hands toward the direction of the shielding and didn’t allow them to cast that many support spells.

This version on the other hand didn’t need anything like that, after the initial activation it would surround the body of the caster with a thick layer of mana. The shield would counter a lot of effects depending on the type and this one was probably focused on mana. Roland of course expected this to happen and had worked without much sleep through the week.

‘Lock on and fire.’

He didn’t get much practice before but in this situation, he had no other way. Controlling the turrets along with the golems took a lot of his brain power. The upgraded parallel thinking skill was just what he needed to make all the calculations in his mind. All the turrets and the spider drones with a large cannon attachment took aim at the charging monster.

A massive aura of mana radiated from the entire Wayland compound that he created. The drones weren’t just using their battery packs to pelt the Lich with low level mana arrows. Instead, they had large cables connected to their abdomens that overloaded their systems to the absolute maximum. With his main battery fully charged and locked away in the underground workshop, coupled with the wind turbines that were constantly spinning he had a reason to believe that taking the Lich down was possible.

The salvo of blue lights flew toward the approaching target. This time however the Lich didn’t just charge like a maddened bull when seeing red. Instead, it stopped in place right after it was out of the forest. There it reacted with haste by slamming the back end of its staff into the ground to produce strange oculus symbols on it.

Soon after, right at the moment, the torrent of magical energy could hit a mass of bones that erupted from underneath the earth. Instead of hitting the skeletal mage, Roland’s artillery collided with this thick layer of white bones. The immense energy wave started producing sparks and melting through this defensive layer and soon produced an explosion that sent white chunks of bones flying everywhere.

He didn’t stop the barrage as the explosion wasn’t a good indicator of the enemy being down. The usual message that the disembodied voice of this world didn’t resound in his head thus it meant that the Lich was not down yet. Following the explosion, a large dust cloud made of various chunks of earth, trees, and shrubs was produced as the mass of energy beams continued to fire on the target.

‘They are starting to overheat...’

Roland would love to continue with this attack until hearing the death message but he wasn’t even sure if he was hitting anything at this point. Conserving his firepower wasn’t on his agenda now but he couldn’t let the turrets and spider golems explode just yet. Thus after a hefty hail of mana bolts and arrows, he initiated the shutting-off procedure. Both the turrets and golems remained on high alert, ready to shoot at anything that moved.

This whole area was his home ground, here he could use the various monitoring sensors to get an idea of what was happening. Even though all the magical energy in the air was slightly interfering with the signal he could still see the green dot that represented the Lich still being there.

“... Are you kidding me, not even a scratch?”

To his surprise, even this amount of magical energy wasn't enough to leave a dent in his enemy. While he expected this to some extent it was more shocking to see it from close range. Roland didn't see himself being able to withstand something like this but the Lich managed to shrug it off.

‘No wait, the mantle became thinner... it must have used up a lot of mana to take that.’

The dust cloud cleared and behind a broken wall of bones stood a rather angry-looking Lich. It just looked towards Roland who was standing in front of the entrance gate to his home. The moment of silence was interrupted by the clattering of the monster's lower jaw. He wasn't sure what it was trying to tell him but for some reason, it looked as if the monster was smiling.

‘I guess it's time to move on with the plan...’