

Runesmith 285

Chapter 285: Runes vs Spells.

“It’s trying to destroy the magical cannons, don’t let it finish that spell!”

A rain of arrows descended at a black-looking skeleton that was in the process of casting some type of spell. Before they could collide with it a large group of white skeletons appeared before it. Acting as a bone shield they deflected the projectiles even suffering destruction after their cores were either pierced or splashed with holy water.

The initial salvo managed to get the magic monster out of casting the spell but it soon resumed the same stance and continued. This time around however, a large skeletal monster with wings appeared to swat those arrows away. Its bones were tougher and it could generate a strong wind that altered the arrow’s trajectory. This allowed the other monster to finish the silent chant and send a ball of flames toward the city walls.

This collision rattled the city defenses but didn’t manage to blast through the gate as it was intended. As the red flames subsided a thin blue glow could be seen on these walls. The skeleton halted the next spell to look for the reason for its blast not being able to blow a hole in the feeble walls. The mana sense it was equipped with made it focus on strange objects stuck in the wall that began vanishing after its spell collided with the wall.

“The mana wards are working but they won’t last forever, resume the defensive and don’t let those monsters through the walls!”

Arthur Valerian looked at Sir Gareth, one of his knights, who was giving orders to the soldiers. The guard captain was next to him but was still an inexperienced soldier that needed to learn proper ways of directing his troops. Instead, the knight took over as he had actually gone through proper classes at a knight academy.

The city wall had been under attack for a while now but it had not fallen. Bringing the magical turrets to this place worked wonders as they were quite good at suppressing the monster’s suicide charges. They weren’t the only magical means of defending that they had.

Usually, only large cities or forts were able to augment their walls with magical shields. In a world, with monsters like that skeletal mage it was a necessity as only magic could go against magic. The walls wouldn’t last through many of those fire blasts and even with the magical shielding through various runic talismans and other implements wouldn’t last forever.

It was a patchwork of various items that were capable of producing shields. The best kind was something that their city Runesmith came up with. The runic parchment would be attached to a flat surface, then whenever this area was attacked by something it would activate a short-lasting shield. It was a one-off defensive measure that needed to be replaced but also wouldn’t be wasted until an attack occurred and didn’t need anyone to activate it.

Even now this city lacked a proper mage which were also rare among adventurer types. Usually, people of this class attended magical academies to make use of their high intelligence stat. It allowed them to breeze through classes that would give anyone else a headache. Thanks to this they were always sought

after for employment in various fields. They didn't really need to put themselves in danger as the regular adventurers.

When they decided to join up with a party, they were fought after by the other adventurers. Even Roland when he was younger was able to join up with one even though his level was low compared to others. People were willing to invest in a mage as having a portable magical turret around made defeating monsters a lot easier.

Then there was a second reason so few mages decided on that type of lifestyle. It was viewed as something barbaric and not as something a magical scholar should work towards. A lot of mages thought themselves to be better than the common man, they were the seekers of truth and magic was a tool to progress this world further. Most innovation was driven by magical research that was supposed to enlighten all the races towards the next step.

What Albrook was left with were magical items and weapons that were far more common. The ones that were able to fire off magical projectiles were all gathered here. The defensive bombardment with the arrows was finite thus after a few salvos the magical items came into play. Various mana arrows with different elements flew toward the white skeletons to hold them off from reaching the wall. It was a supportive measure to act together with the turrets that were working for the time being.

"Can we do something about those black ones?"

Arthur turned towards Mary while looking out to the battlefield. There he saw the black mage preparing another spell, only thanks to the ranged attacks were they able to hold that thing back from damaging their walls. Ordering his men to engage in combat before the walls were destroyed wasn't something that he was willing to do yet. Walls and magical items could be replaced but the troops that he was bringing up couldn't.

"We have assembled a couple of gold rank adventurer teams but we might not be able to isolate them from the white ones."

"... Hm... carry on, for now, perhaps an opportunity will present itself to us."

They were clearly outnumbered but had the advantage as the walls weren't breached yet. For the time being it was a stalemate but sooner or later they would run out of mana wards and the magical items would lose their charge. The turrets were still prone to overheating and if they didn't get to that mage then a breach would happen.

"Lord Arthur, we might have a problem!"

"What's wrong?"

"The winged black skeleton... it's trying to get behind the gates!"

Just as he was getting comfortable with the defensive a problem arose. The large gargoyle-looking undead monster that was previously using his wings to protect the mage from getting hit by arrows started moving.

"The mage used some sort of protection spell."

"Are they changing their tactics?"

This was somewhat surprising, monsters like these didn't really have that much intelligence or strategic capabilities. They could follow basic movements or emulate human creatures to attack them. Normally they would stick to one tactic throughout the whole siege and for that they were mostly prepared for. They were using the fact that the creature capable of flying would stick around the mage just as it did down in the dungeon.

Instead, the two split off from each other leaving the mage alone. The arrows that had blessed water attached to it didn't seem to be able to get through this ominous-looking shielding and this wasn't the end of it. There were three black skeletons, one looking like some kind of beast that walked on four legs. Previously all three of those monsters were sticking together and letting the white skeletons attack but now all of them moved simultaneously.

The mage took care of the arrow rain while the flying monster moved out of the range of the arrows and magical spells. It shot through the air and headed towards the main gate while keeping its distance. Then the largest one of them, the one that looked like a beast charged forward in the same direction.

"The arrows won't be able to reach the monster and if we turn the magic weapons away from the battlefield that other monster..."

Arthur moved to the edge of the wall to look at what was happening. In the distance, he could hear his knight shouting to change the target to the flying monster. If they could get it down before the monsters approached then it would be fine but it seemed that the enemy was convinced otherwise. It looked to be a diversion tactic to allow the beast-like monster to get to the gate or to lessen the assault on the mage.

The beast type was large and was also a tier 3. This put it above tier 2 class holders but this didn't mean that it would be able to last through all the low-tier magical attacks. From Arthur's standpoint, the tactic was easy to see through. If they focused on the gargoyle above then the mage and the beast type could become a problem.

The caster would be able to resume casting while the other tried to maul the entrance gate. On the other hand, if they focused on the mage and beast-type then the gargoyle would get over the gate. Whoever was directing the monsters was convinced that one way or the other the monsters would get through the gate. Either from inside or from outside with the city defenders not having enough firepower to stop them, at least without directly engaging them in combat.

"Sir Gareth, focus your attention on the mage and the black skeleton charging at the main gate, let the flying one through."

"My lord?... Understood, you heard the lord, take aim."

"Lord Arthur?"

"Don't worry, that thing won't be able to do much even if it crosses the wall."

Mary didn't press further as she was aware of what her lord knew. Instead of focusing on the flying monster, the city guard continued pelting the other monsters with their ranged arsenal. Besides the magical turrets various more conventional cannons had been placed there as well. The lighting mechanism was through magical means but the result was very similar to an older model cannon.

The charging monster's approach was stopped by one of the cannon balls colliding with its skeletal form. Even though it was a tier 3 creature it could not just shrug off attacks like this, at least not too many as even after taking a few the black bones only showed a couple of fractures. These broken bones were quick to surround themselves with a strange green glow that started mending them back to health.

While the frontal attack was unsuccessful and the mage continued to be unable to cast a spell the flying monster made its way into the city. Even though it was made of bones it could generate a screeching sound that started shattering the windows to some of the homes. Its target wasn't the citizens nor was it causing panic inside, what it needed to aim for was the gate through which its friends would be able to come inside and then the true battle would begin.

However, after landing on the ground and examining its surroundings the monster felt that something was off. It expected more of the little soldiers here but instead only one of them stood before it. This one was different, it didn't radiate fear like the others.

"I hate doing things for three... your bones better be worth the hassle."

A large bald man approached it, over his shoulder he was resting a gigantic-looking axe made of dark metal. It was clear that the man was not perturbed by the large monster before as a faint smile was forming on his face.

"Might as well enjoy this, haven't been able to let loose in a while..."

The skeletal gargoyle spread its wings wide to intimidate its foe but it didn't look like it resulted in any flinching. Instead, the bald man that was of similar size charged forward, cracks appeared in the spot that he started from and that massive axe made a clean arc toward the monster's head...

...

"If regular mana doesn't work then perhaps..."

Roland's attack continued as after the smoke had cleared the monster still remained standing. Usually, he would pick off a monster's weak point and use it against them. In the dungeon where he lived next to this element was ice or water. There was a problem with this type of undead creature though as its nature made it immune to any cold effects.

With this element not being effective, there was no real advantage over using other elemental spells besides earth that was better at producing blunt damage. This however was a lot more mana-intensive which was why he first attempted an elemental-less approach that could potentially damage the monster's hidden core.

Normally in a spell caster battle, the one with more mana and intelligence would win. In this case, however, Roland had one advantage over the being of magic that he was facing, speed. The Lich was able to silently chant and perhaps even counter-spell interruptions but it could not produce these effects with the same speed as a person using Runic weapons.

At this moment the Lich's lower jaw opened wide and began clattering. It was as if the monster was smiling while moving the boney staff covered with mana stones forward. This item surprised Roland slightly, it looked like it had gathered various mana stones and other gems together to fuse it to the

skull. He didn't fully understand the process but he could tell that it was amplifying the monster's magic even more.

Roland didn't wait for his enemy to perform the silent chant. Even though he couldn't hear it, thanks to his own mana sense the tiny mana particles that were swirling around the monsters could be seen by him. This kind of process would always happen around a spell caster, even without being able to hear the spell it was possible for him to tell that one was being produced.

"Too slow!"

While the Lich could probably produce spells faster than the average magician he could not contend with something like runes. These marvels of magical technology could almost instantly produce similar effects. There were no interruptions unless the runic structure was damaged and a person could activate them whenever they pleased. In the middle of a battle where mistakes could be made something like this had a drastic advantage.

The spell activation was only affected by the quickness of injecting mana into the runic system. Even with this drawback, the Lich would not be able to contend with Roland's speed. Just as the monster was raising his staff to produce some type of spell his opponent was doing the same.

Roland's left hand which was not holding on to the large hammer started glowing. The coloring was ambiguous and blue lacking any unique elemental pattern. Only as the spell structure outside of the gauntlet started to condense could the Lich sense the earth elementals around the magical construct.

Many small bullet-sized rocks appeared before his hand. Almost instantly as they appeared they were already gone and traveling towards their destination. The mantle that the Lich was covered in contended with these high-speed rocks that were comparable to a machine gun. However this was all in Roland's calculations, he knew that he wouldn't be able to go through the shield with just this but the rocks carried a little bonus effect with them.

Through his visor, he could see the mana molecules slowing down. The Lich's spell which would normally take a few seconds to condense began to slow down. Disrupting a mage's spells was a textbook way of disarming them. It was a tactic used by battle mages that used easier-to-cast spells to augment their fighting style. Without anyone to protect the spell caster from being interrupted their fighting prowess was diminished.

After successfully being able to halt the spell effect from taking shape he ordered the turrets to shoot forth to continue with the stalling tactic. He on the other hand gripped his magical hammer with both his hands and slammed it on the ground. This caused a strange brownish aura to appear over the spot that he hit.

This light spot shot out toward the enemy Lich which left cracked earth behind it. It traveled at quite a fast pace while zig-zagging in random directions. Soon the strange glow found its way under the monster that was still trying to launch a counter-offensive against the human it wanted to examine.

The brown radiance expanded around the targeted monster to around four meters. Soon after a bunch of rocky pillars shot out on the edges of the area the glow made. These quickly jolted down to fall on top of the monster burying it under a mass of hardened earth in the process. Then to finish the effect a large explosion shook the earth while being focused on the entrapped monster.

“Not enough...”

Even though the monster was still buried in the rubble of his combination spell, Roland was sure that it was still alive. The physical trauma probably rattled its bones but it was not enough to deliver a finishing blow just yet. Thus before the monster shook the rocky bits off he decided to retreat toward his home ground. There perhaps he would be able to finally end this whole confrontation once and for all.

Chapter 286: Walking into a trap.

An explosion of what some might call evil energy burst forth. It pushed a mass of collapsed stones to the side hitting the already broken trees. From under an angry-looking monster emerged, his eye sockets were burning with emerald flames. The rubble that was covering the monster started to melt while glowing red.

The monster emerged from this magically produced hole while looking around. The annoying mechanical bugs and the stationary objects were still aiming their cannons toward this monster. The blue light show didn't stop even when their bodies turned red and the runes started melting into the metal.

This was however not what the monster was focusing on instead, it looked at the gate before it that was in the process of being closed. It could feel that the target it was after had vanished behind it. The Lich decided to give chase but it needed to take care of this minor inconvenience that persisted.

After taking a step forward it rose its staff high up to produce a mass of greenish flames. They expanded out from the magic staff to produce a mass of snakes. These phantom vipers quickly shot forth at the golemic creations that were defending this place. Even when colliding with the blue mana beams the flame snakes were able to continue toward their destination.

The blue spider golems stood no chance, the moment the strange spell collided with it, their runic traces were disrupted and their armor bent out of shape. Due to how they were connected to mana generators by large cables they were nothing more than sitting ducks. The larger turrets lasted a bit more as the green vipers stopped at the protective mana shield first but after just a second of pushing the flimsy barrier shattered.

Due to the nature of this spell the monster needed to remain stationary. It directed it at all the stationary targets and in a matter of a few moments it had managed to destroy them all. In the places where the metallic devices were nothing but scrap metal and flames existed. The Lich finally took a step forward, it still needed to capture the armored being, and with nothing in its way it had free reign now.

It noticed something though, after taking the first step it lost a bit of its balance, when looking down it noticed that its big toe was missing. This was not all, only now did it realize that it had actually sustained some damage through the continued magical barrage. Its bones were cracked in a few places and even if it could somewhat mend itself back to health this angered it.

The monster felt rage build up in it first, it was the mana cannon that almost killed it and now this. It had been injured by the prey it was chasing and it didn't know how to handle the feeling of anger that was building up. The Lich was a monster with high intelligence but it had practically been born a few months ago. It didn't know how to handle something like that and the instinct was to lash out at everything that was around it.

Even though it was a being made of magic with no flesh the feeling of hate and anger was something it was capable of emulating. Thus without thinking much about the repercussions of blindly charging forward it used the few phantom vipers that were still there to collide with the wall. It was far more sturdy than the mechanical turrets or the golems but with some aid from its mana, the spells were able to melt through the protective lining and create a path for it.

“It sounds mad...”

Roland was on the other side of the wall, he scrambled behind the front gate and into the fence made from thick wires. At the end of this cage was another door made from metal that he quickly sprinted towards. Behind it Agni waited with lowered ears, clearly afraid of the predicament that they found themselves in.

This monster was a high-level undead but contrary to everyone's belief these monsters weren't devoid of emotions. It was actually the reverse, they magnified all of the negative ones to the extreme. Roland used this knowledge to lure the monster here, the few wounds that he managed to deliver would surely madden the monster sending it into a frenzied state. It was a well-known tactic when going against such creatures and the more intelligence they possessed the higher the chance of actually affecting those negative emotions.

The monster was making a lot of noise outside, without even looking behind himself he could see a deep emerald glow emanating everywhere. The mana that this creature was capable of producing was truly tremendous, something that he could only compare to the woman from the Solarian Inquisition that fought against one of those abyssal creatures. Now, something on that level was after him and he wasn't sure about his chances of victory.

“Agni, I told you to get back, go to the extraction point as we agreed.”

“Wooooo!”

To his dismay, his ruby wolf didn't seem to want to budge from the spot he was in. He had specifically told him to wait in the workshop where he would be safe if the Lich managed to get through the main entrapment. Perhaps it was due to Roland lacking any taming-related skills but Agni developed his own way of thinking and handling things and loyalty was one of them.

Perhaps if this was any other moment Roland would have given Agni the boot but right then, he noticed a lot of heat colliding with his reinforced gate. This gate had been produced in his own workshop and worked on by Bernir. Even now he remembered all the trouble of getting it there. Now a huge hole was burnt in the middle of it through magical means.

There it was, just walking through the molten metal like it was nothing. The drops of red blistering hot liquid just dribbled down on the monster as it was stepping through. The mana mantle it was clad with was still there but to Roland's keen eye he could see a difference.

‘It's not as thick and the mana is becoming unstable...’

This monster was clearly in a state of engagement, this would momentarily boost some of its stats but also lessen others. Something like this was just what he wanted, for creatures that required intelligence for their attacks like this one going into a maddened state wasn't favorable. Its casting times would be

reduced and it would probably have trouble reacting with the correct spells. Instead, it would probably attempt to use its sheer superior mana to get ahead in this fight.

There it was at his entrance gate. The cage made from wire was already heating up with the monster standing in it. The path it needed to travel through wasn't far, around ten meters until it would reach Roland whom it was after. Thus without much thought to it, the Lich charged forward as if it had become a monster that fought at close range. This however was just the thing he was waiting for.

Right as the monster was around the middle of this cage he sprung the trap that he had been building up for almost a whole week. Everything was building up to this very moment and he needed to make sure that the monster didn't see through it. It was very important to enrage the monster before this process as he wasn't sure if it wouldn't be able to detect the ruse it was standing on.

With his connection to the entire company through his recently gained Basic Runic Region skill, everything around here could be activated remotely. Soon a large runic mana pattern started shining through the ground and quickly changing color from the usual pale blue to a deeper yellowish coloring. This elemental mana was the main weakness of all undead and evil creatures, the holy element.

The glow encompassed the entire cage and turned the thick wires into something that looked golden. Everything became illuminated in a divine glow that instantly caused the monster a massive amount of pain. Its movements became sluggish and the trajectory it was on had been broken. Instead of colliding with the door on the other end it stumped forward and onto its own knees.

"It's working better than I expected."

Roland gave out a sigh of relief as he saw the monster drop down to its knees around a meter before reaching the end of the cage. A lot of smoke had been kicked up and the creature was kicking up a fuss. The green flames that it was usually producing started subsiding as it tried to gather mana around itself for protection.

The Mana Mantle spell that it was using had been degenerating even before being hit by the holy trap and was quickly fading away. The moment the monster's bones were exposed to this divine energy it wouldn't take that long for it to suffer critical damage.

He was surprised at just how well his hastily constructed plan had worked. First, he placed the dummy traps around the forest to make the monster drop its defenses. If it convinced itself that it could detect any tricks then it would have been easy to make it walk into one. This he achieved by creating this new buried invention that had been hidden from sight.

The glow and runic symbols started slowly burning through the hidden soil. Under the monster's feet was a large plate of metal. It had been magically welded together from many other plates and connected to his underground generator along with empyrean crystals that were the power source of this improved Undead Ward spell.

Usually, this spell was used to ward undead creatures away by creating a shield that they wouldn't be able to transverse. However, with a few alterations and an undead being stuck inside it would be like tossing a person into an active furnace. Before his eyes he could see the tier 3 Lich burning up, his bones were starting to crack and all movement was impossible.

The biggest problem was actually figuring out the wavelength of the divine spells and maximizing the output to this extent. The divine crystals were finite and he couldn't ask for many more from Arthur as they needed them for the city defenses. If the undead made it inside the city there were holy weapons waiting for them and some of them did require those rare gems to work.

Following that he also needed to safeguard the trap from being found out. Usually, magical traps were easily detectable by a person with a high enough mana sense. With how the monster Lich had one that overshadowed his own, he needed to find a reasonable countermeasure. This was actually a lot easier than he initially expected as he just used the area the trap was in.

A magical workshop like this had all sorts of magical devices lying and working around. It wasn't that hard to mask the large cage among the vast quantity of magical patterns everywhere. The monster would not be able to pinpoint anything when everything was giving out a strong mana signature. Even less considering he had purposely given the other traps a unique wavelength to throw everything off. Then with the help of the enraged status, the whole thing came together nicely.

'This output isn't as strong as that of the mana cannon but it's doing a lot more damage to this monster.'

It was actually a little anticlimactic to see the monster crawling on the ground. It turned from something on the level of an abyssal monster to nothing in the span of a few seconds. The weakness of divine energies like this was truly tremendous. A human being or most monsters would not really feel anything besides a warm glow when going inside this cage. The Lich on the other hand was quickly evaporating.

With this revelation, Roland glanced and examined the magical device that was somewhat holding together. Even though this would probably end the monster he needed to make sure that it didn't crumble on itself. It was still an experimental trial product that was hastily put together by someone that wasn't even a tier 3 craftsman. Only thanks to the monster's susceptibility to an elemental type was all of this possible.

'I expected it to put up a fight at least, I didn't even need to reinforce all these wires...'

It did seem a bit too easy, Roland had expected the monster to at least trash around the cage like a maddened beast. He was ready to inject more mana into the magical runes or even be forced to attack it with regular spells but none of this would be needed. It was clearly unable to handle all of this divine energy.

The only explanation he could come up with was that either the divine crystals that Arthur gave him were of exceptional quality or he made some strides with his emulation technology. At this point, he didn't know that much but with the help of his runic eyes, he was somewhat able to alter the mana composition to gain something similar.

This emulated divine energy was mixed into the system to give it more juice and perhaps it was this new technology step that sealed the deal. After this was all over he needed to perfect the system and perhaps he would be able to integrate healing runes into his armor. Of course, he would need to hide this fact from the church or at least mask this deed by inserting an empyrean crystal into the suit. If they got weary he could just point to it being the source of the spells instead.

"Awoooo!"

However, his dreams of a glorious future were interrupted by a loud howl from his trusted companion. There was one thing that he forgot to monitor during this whole predicament. Before the Lich tossed itself toward the forest to follow after the first spider drone and then Agni it made some orders. It didn't truly come alone as there was one monster following behind it.

Roland couldn't really help it as his monitoring system wasn't perfect. He had to relay all of his workshop power toward the forward cannons and focus on the monster that was before him. His technology was still in its infancy and there was a limitation to how it operated.

This was due to the signals these devices sent out which could be interrupted by an abundance of mana in the surroundings. Considering his workshop had become a battlefield with magical effects it wasn't strange that his mapping device could update in time. Even now he couldn't see the red dot in the correct place which was right in front of the gate.

It emerged to save its creator, rushing through the melted gate and creating an even larger opening than before. The monster was the same type that he had blown up before down in the dungeon that looked like a skeleton belonging to a gorilla. Its frame was a lot larger than its masters but it still wasn't as strong as the Lich. While it wouldn't last in the cage covered in holy energy this wasn't what it was planning or in this case what its master had ordered it to do.

The monster rushed inside and its body began to instantly be affected by the enhanced holy spell. Roland wasn't sure why it decided to send its creature inside the trap instead of ordering it to attack it from outside. Perhaps the Lich's mind was at its end or it didn't know if that was a possibility. Instead, it went for a direct approach of yanking the Lich out of the cage through the hole in the gate.

"Shit!"

Roland shouted while grasping the glowing cables with both his hands. The divine mana of the trap would affect the other monster and be also able to kill it. The problem was that it already jumped from the other side and the momentum could not be stopped. The only way he could stop this was by increasing the output of this cage as there was not enough time to send another spell to keep the other monster away.

He had been caught off guard as he was patting himself on the back. The victory was so close but he had perhaps squandered it all. The radiance of all the mana here had caused him to be unable to see the incoming monster. If he was just able to keep it from entering the cage for a few more seconds the Lich would be done for and along with it all of its minions.

Instead, he could see a blurry image of the black skeleton approaching the kneeling Lich that had lost parts of its body. The obsidian skeleton was disintegrating right before him but it wasn't fast enough and overloading the cage wasn't enough. The last thing he saw before the light exploded everywhere was a large skeletal hand reaching towards the Lich, grabbing it, and promptly hurling it towards the only existing exit...