

Runesmith 291

Chapter 291: Platinum Adventurers.

“Awright, kin someone dae something about that dog?”

“Ah wonder how tis doggie tastes...”

“It’s not a dog, it’s a Dire Ruby Wolf but usually their mana-controlling instrument isn’t this advanced, it must have gone through an interesting diet and you can certainly not eat it.”

A handsome sun elf shrugged at the two dwarves from his party as they were looking in the direction of a ruby-encrusted monster. It belonged to the runesmith that lived here and at the moment he had delved into the destroyed home to fetch something.

“Calm down boys, that Runesmith fellow will probably show up soon and then we can leave.”

“Why don’t we just go in, what if he tries to run?”

A woman that was wearing quite the large hat that made her look like a wizard conversed with a large burly man. The man didn’t seem to be okay with the man making them wait. They came to take care of the Lich but were apparently too late to the party. What they were waiting for was confirmation that the monster was actually dead as they couldn’t leave otherwise.

“Why do we even need to confirm the kill, the reanimated skeletons are all dead, doesn’t that mean that the Lich should too?”

“You’re not wrong to assume that Braum but Liches are smart creatures, there were incidents where a Lich played dead to save their life and then massacred the adventurer party that didn’t notice.”

The magician replied in a leisured tone while looking around the somewhat destroyed scenery. Her gaze was drawn away from the large member of her party to a strange spinning object in the distance. Several strange towers that seemingly were windmills stood there. Some of them had been destroyed by some magical spell but a few lasted through. Even now she could feel mana particles forming around them in a strange way.

“Shouldn’t we follow him then Myrtle, what if it just played dead?”

“That won’t be needed, that incident was a peculiar one. For some reason, the party forgot about the world’s words. They should have been able to identify that the Lich was faking it but rumors say that they were already tired.”

The lady smiled while looking at Roland’s windmills. This case was a failure, one the party included and the full story was now muddled. It wasn’t strange to forget about the words from their world that people had different ways to interpret. Sometimes the disembodied voice could not be heard if a person was injured or if it was loud. The game-like screens would also be hard to envision in a dark environment which could have led to that predicament happening.

“Hm...”

“Woof!”

She took one step towards those interesting contraptions but was instantly stopped by an angry wolf. While the monster didn't really pose a threat to her or her party members, they couldn't just shove it to the side while the owner of this place was away. The knight that belonged to the Valerian household was still there. Even though he was weak and a non-issue if something happened to him, they would probably be blamed now after the Lich was dead.

"Can't wait for five minutes?"

A voice resounded from the crumbling home that belonged to its owner. Soon a large man dressed in magical armor emerged with a large monster skull in his left hand. Without a doubt, it belonged to an undead magician as it had lingering tier 3 mana around it. With this, the mission of this party had kind of been ruined as they had been tasked with taking out the monster themselves. They would only be getting part of their commission due to this, which made the whole trip here a big waste of time.

...

"This should be enough to confirm the kill, I hope you don't expect me to return the monster's remains, it died in one of my traps and by law, it belongs to me."

"It does seem that it's the Lich and don't worry Mr. Wayland was it? We would not do such a thing."

"One of your party members wanted to eat my tamed wolf, you'll have to excuse me for being wary."

The old woman laughed at Roland's comment. In reality, he would probably not be able to do anything else than trigger the explosives around the entire compound and make a run for it if they decided to attack him. The woman looked to be in her mid-thirties but Roland had the suspicion that she was somehow altering her appearance. It wasn't strange for magicians to have access to some life-prolonging magic or elixirs. Considering that she had the highest level of the whole group here it wouldn't be strange if she was a lot older than she led people to believe.

"Myrtle, this wasn't what we agreed on!"

"What do you want me to do, revive the Lich so we can kill it again? I'm not that sort of mage."

Roland peeked at the party of five and while they were arguing he decided to go through their levels and classes. Luckily the group wasn't wearing any protective trinkets to protect them from an identification attempt. To him this was strange but not everyone had things to hide like a certain runaway noble.

<table border="1">

Name:

Myrtle L 202

<td rowspan="5">

Classes:

T3 Cryomancer L 52

T2 Advanced Ice Mage L 50

T2 Ice Mage L 50

T1 Mana Scribe L 25

T1 Mage L 25

;

The woman had put a lot of faith into just one element of choosing. A Cryomancer class was able to produce quite the array of ice spells. It wasn't strange for someone like her to appear at a mission involving a fire dungeon but her ice magic wouldn't be that effective against a Lich.

<table border="1">;

Name:

Aubron L 175

<td rowspan="5">

Classes:

T3 Bowmaster L25

T2 Marksman L50

T2 Ranger L50

T1 Hunter L25

T1 Archer L25

;

The sun elf was clearly a one-trick pony as well. He had stuck to marksmanship-related classes and was even focusing on one weapon with the Bowmaster tier 3 class. It was a class that was specifically good at handling bows and anything related to them. It also furthered most of the tracking skills a hunter and a ranger would have brought to the table.

The two dwarves named Hermond and Delmond had very similar class composition and weren't worthwhile to investigate. One was a Shield Master and the other one was a Polearm Master, not very prestigious classes that only focused on one particular piece of equipment. Then there was the last member of the party that had a more unique setup.

<table border="1">;

Name:

Braum L 181

<td rowspan="5">

Classes:

T3 Beastial Druid L31

T2 Beast Shifter L50

T2 Barbarian L50

T1 Brute L25

T1 Warrior L25

;

He was a Druid and the name implied that he could change into some type of beast. He was already the size of the adventurer guild master but perhaps he could even bulk up more. The man looked like a beastman from a bear tribe but it could have actually just been part of his class skill of shifting his body.

The Beast shifter class would allow an individual to alter parts of their body. For instance, they could enhance their limbs by growing sharp talons or powerful jaws with a bunch of teeth. However, a tier 3 variant of the Bestial Druid allowed them to change their form entirely. A person could even shift between more than one form. Instead of just turning into a large wolf they could become something between the two, a werewolf. It was a class that allowed them to become monsters that kept their intelligence and could even use weapons or armor.

‘That’s probably why he isn’t covering his chest much, the increase in size would destroy it anyway...’

Roland went through the classes and also the high levels and came to a conclusion. He would probably not be able to handle any of these people alone. At least not while they were so close and he was still injured from the last fight. However, he needed to continue the charade as these people could probably not see his true level. If they thought that he was capable of defeating a Lich by himself, then they would think before attempting anything drastic.

Myrtle was approached by the blond sun elf that looked a bit maddened by the lack of monsters to kill. The group didn’t really do anything so they wouldn’t even have the right to the reanimated skeletal bones outside. As a platinum adventurer party they would be given a downpayment that would cover their travel expenses and a few other things. This didn’t mean that they wouldn’t be bleeding money.

The expenses a platinum-rank adventurer party went through to manage their magical instruments was high. They needed to continue making money, if one of their weapons broke during a monster subjugation it would take an astronomical sum of gold to replace it. While in a sense they weren’t losing anything by coming here, they were not gaining much in return either.

They needed the full bounty together with the Lich’s remains to be ahead but now that was impossible. When adding the time to get back to a place that could earn them a good sum of money, they could be set back by several weeks or even a whole month. This of course was not his problem, thanks to Arthur’s soldiers and knight being here the monster remains would probably remain here.

It wouldn’t be strange for him to be forced to relinquish it in any other circumstance. Now that he had officially become Arthur’s Runesmith, it wouldn’t be easy to bully him by anyone that wasn’t a noble themselves. A regular citizen had no hopes of going against a powerful adventurer party like this. Even if someone died, without any connections and money there would not be much of an investigation.

Things would usually go in favor of the adventurers as they were an important asset to the kingdom they resided in. Monsters were always a problem and it wasn't strange for retired adventurers to be hired by nobles. They would become knight captains or direct bodyguards, even teachers to noble children if they had some particularly good skills.

Luckily for him, these people could not bully him to give up the loot he had earned. Considering how his whole home was destroyed in the process, this Lich's bones were the least he could get. The rare monster core drop on the other hand would go for a lot more than the body. It was an item that could be used for various magical items and probably even elixirs. If he auctioned it off at the auction house then the whole incident would put him ahead.

'I'll hold onto it, for now, maybe when I get my next class I'll be able to gain something from it.'

Roland was also a magical researcher and was interested in what he could discover in an undead monster's core. It wasn't that damaged and if it possessed all the information that the Lich had, he might even be able to get to the bottom of those spells it used. While necromancy was frowned upon, it didn't mean that spells that could produce skeletons were outright forbidden.

Understanding all the various elemental wavelengths was something he was in the middle of doing and undead magic was part of it. He was already trying to produce a divine healing spell by way of runic circuits so something on the other end could work too.

"I think we should go back to the city, Lord Arthur needs to hear this."

"I agree but I can't just leave this place with those thieves running unchecked."

The Knight leader of the city guards wanted to take him away to the city. Roland wasn't against filling in Arthur about what transpired here but he also didn't want to get robbed blind either. The corpses of the thieves were visible to everyone and they were still fresh.

"I understand but the Lord requires your presence, Runesmith, and as I recall you are now also contractually obligated."

"I see that you did your homework but there are other ways to have meetings, so we can have one here while the soldiers keep unwanted ears away."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this, you've probably seen something similar to it."

Roland didn't spend five minutes grabbing the skull of the Lich. He had already taken the monster's remains and placed them inside his workshop before the adventurers even arrived here. What he did for most of that time was to search for a crystal ball that wasn't damaged in the scuffle. Most of them had been destroyed by the Lich and the explosions inside his underground workshop, all besides a prototype he was working on beforehand.

"Is that a crystal ball, why is it in that glass box?"

"Oh, that's quite an interesting magical instrument, did you make it?"

"Yes..."

While he was talking with the knight the Cryomancer walked forward. They were probably also in need of new orders from the lord. In reality, he wanted to bring this group of five up to the Lord as they had failed their current job but it didn't mean that they couldn't do something else. Considering that they needed to move to the dungeon to make a sweep of potential threats, this party of five would be the perfect group of bodyguards for the next stage of the plan.

What was in his hand was a one-meter-wide square box with a crystal ball in the middle. It wasn't floating but had a bunch of metallic wires wrapped around it. The final product wasn't meant to show the insides of this magical device. He had just used it like an open PC case so he could easily see what was happening inside. It was a lot easier to monitor if everything was working and if he didn't need to change some of the circuitry.

He could already see the people gathered here looking at this ugly contraption with confusion. The only one that was truly intrigued, was the fellow mage that could probably feel the strange mana fluctuations that it was giving off. While caster classes couldn't create items like this they could distinguish between ones that were worth their while. With their high intelligence stat, their analyzing skill was usually quite advanced.

"I don't think we have the time..."

"We don't? Did you expect to be back by dinner time when you set out to kill a Lich or something?"

The knight was left speechless as Roland shot him down. The man was probably a lesser noble or some kind of bastard son of one. This was probably not something he expected to hear from a commoner. Every time Arthur's name was mentioned it was to push Roland into obeying but it certainly didn't work. At least it was clear that this knight didn't know that he was a noble in hiding himself, otherwise, he would probably not be this pushy.

"If not then just give me a minute, I'll have Arthur ... I mean Lord Arthur here in a moment."

While the knight was not his match the other five adventurers were. He did not know if those five would move if the knight barked out a few orders. Considering that he was a magical craftsman of worth, he wasn't that scared. Arthur's investment into him was probably known to everyone now and destroying such a costly investment wouldn't be taken lightly.

"Oh my, I have never seen a crystal ball operate like that..."

"Is that Lord Arthur in person?"

"Wayland?... Sir Morien, is that you?"

Within a few minutes, he had placed the magical device down on the ground and rigged it to one of the exposed power cables with his crafting skills. Even though he could power it himself it would be better to use the main workshop battery that he didn't need to blow up. With its help, the magical projector that used the crystal ball as a medium could produce a larger image of Arthur from the waist up.

"Yes My Lord, we have confirmed the death of the Lich and were about to return to the city."

"That is reassuring and I see that Mr. Wayland is also fine, did you defeat it yourself?"

"I'm not sure if defeating is the right word but yes, it did die after stepping into one of my traps."

Roland peeked at the magician getting closer to the magical projection. She seemed interested in it but it probably wasn't the best idea to get between him and a noble talking. Morien that was there was already looking at her in a funny way but her aid would be required soon.

Roland just needed to steer the conversation in a way that he could have Arthur push the adventurers into the dungeon, with their help he would be able to instantly continue his dungeon dealings. The only problem was their loyalty, if they ran over to the other Valerian house members then it would become troublesome...

Chapter 292: Aftermath.

"All things considered, this went better than expected, this amount of damage is indeed minor."

"I'm glad that the destruction of my home is considered 'minor damage', Lord Arthur."

Roland replied to Arthur while Morien and Myrtle listened in from the side. It was quite surprising for them to see someone acting in this fashion when talking to a noble. While he was inserting the proper titles here and there, it seemed he didn't feel intimidated by the title.

"Haha, I'll be sure to task someone with the repair of your gate, with all those skeleton bones lying around. It won't be hard to find the funds for it but some of those will be needed to cover the damages to the city gates, some of those magical turrets of yours melted down..."

"I told the dwarves to not overuse them, unless we make them from a superior alloy they will keep breaking down during long sieges."

Roland frowned while pushing the blame on the dwarves that were tasked with tending to his turret system. Those that he installed at the city gates were the same ones he had here. They were still made from tier 2 grade materials and required a cooling period between firing off mana bolts. It was likely that the defenders got overzealous and didn't let them cool down enough between shots.

There was a possibility of hardwiring a forced feature that would bring the turrets offline if they start overheating. He decided not to include it however, as during a siege it was still better to have the magical guns suffer damage than the defenders behind them. An operator needed to decide if it was better to let them rest or continue attacking if the situation was dire enough.

"Perhaps next time it would be better if a proper Runesmith tends to the runic devices instead~"

A grumbling sound escaped from Roland's lips after he heard Arthur's response. Soon their conversation started wrapping up.

"Nevertheless, you may keep the Lich remains but I don't think I can hand over the remains of the skeletons that are outside of the city. With this we can finally open the gates, that is unless you have something more to add?"

"No that's about it, Lord Arthur..."

"If that is all, then Sir Morien. Take the soldiers and do a sweep around the forest, there might be other monsters that could have made it inside the forest. Securing the dungeon entrance is also a priority, we must establish the route there again."

“Yes Sir.”

“What are we supposed to do now?”

“You can help the soldiers with securing the dungeon entrance but if there are not tier 3 monsters to kill for you, then I’m not sure if our agreement will stand, you’ll have to consult with the Guild Master, it was a joint effort between the guild and the city.”

Arthur replied to the cryomancer who was still standing there. Her expression remained docile and without emotion but a faint smile crept up the moment the noble mentioned a potential breach in the contract. This would of course mean that they wouldn’t be getting money if there was no Lich to defeat. They would not get the tier 3 monster materials that sold for gold coins either and the trip to this remote region would mostly be wasted.

“I see, I’m sure to have a conversation with the Guild Master then...”

“I’ll excuse myself then, My Lord.”

“Take care and return safely after you complete your mission.”

“By your command!”

Sir Morien performed the usual knightly salute while Roland just stood there and listened. Finally, after the two were going away he could continue with the conversation. He did not mention his plan to the adventurer party as he did not know where their allegiance lied.

“Wayland, is there something more you wish to discuss? If not then I need to get back to...”

Roland peeked behind himself and could still see the adventurer party there along with the soldiers. They were slowly exiting the premises but it would probably take a while until they couldn’t eavesdrop on the conversation. There were two options he could take, one of them was just cutting the feed and contacting Arthur before the adventurer party returned to the city.

This tactic carried a risk of Arthur going away on official business and not being there for a talk. He could not expect a busy noble like him to drop everything just to speak to him every time. The citizens of the city were probably waiting for him to make a speech and finally allow them to leave.

Thus instead he activated a sound barrier through which the others wouldn’t be able to listen in. It would alert the adventurer party to the hidden talks but not like they had a reason to hear it. Normally there a sound barrier spell could be used for this occasion to block out any outgoing sounds. However Roland didn’t need it, instead, he could directly interface with this runic device and send the sound into his helmet. Not even Myrtle a tier 3 mage, or the tier 3 archer would be able to listen into the conversation.

“There is one thing I wanted to mention, it’s about the Platinum Adventurer party, do you think we can trust them? Also, don’t worry, they won’t be able to hear what we are talking about”

“Is that so? About trusting them? I’m not sure, they are supposedly people that Guild Master Aurdhan knows. They came here at his behest, it wouldn’t be strange if they owed him something.”

“They did get here fast, all things considered.”

Roland nodded as he also agreed that Aurdhan had to have some kind of pull with these five. But he could have just chosen this group as they were willing to do more for less, perhaps the monetary offer was enough to make them move. It wasn't strange for tier 3 adventurers to have a lot of debt either, they could have been desperate and he used his knowledge of their situation to his advantage.

"We could use those five if you could get them to sign a contract, remember what I told you about the passage to the other dungeon?"

"That... yes we could use them to help us with that issue, it would hasten the process by a lot..."

Arthur started looking down at the ground and thinking. Roland was sure that if it was possible that this noble would push for everything to go as fast as possible. One thing that this man didn't seem to have was time, he was constantly taking risky bets which could be avoided if he just waited a while for things to play themselves out.

"I'll have to talk to the Guild Master but what about you? Are you in a state to prepare that passage in the dungeon?"

"While parts of my workshop have been destroyed, I should be able to get the tools I need within a few days... I'll just have to get a few things in order but it will be doable."

Roland didn't really want to leave his home while it was destroyed but this was a good chance to move things along. If they let this platinum party go now they could be waiting months for another one to arrive. The city was also in a lockdown which put Arthur in a better position. His authority could not be denied, in crisis situations, nobles gained a lot more authoritative power over the citizens and even the adventurer guild.

"Hm..."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, I just thought that you, my friend, might be even crazier than me."

"I'm not sure if that's a compliment or an insult..."

"I'd say both, but now is not the time to chat, we both have a lot of work to do."

"Before you go, there is one last issue."

"Go on."

"Could you not mention that I was the one that defeated the Lich?"

"You do not wish to be mentioned?"

"Yes."

"Hm... I understand but what do you want me to say? If I tell the people that the adventurers defeated it, then they might want to keep the full reward."

"How about, you just mention that your own soldiers did it, by luring the monster into a trap?"

"I guess that could work but don't you want the title of hero? I'm sure you'd be also able to profit a lot from this incident."

"It's enough if you just mention that I made the trap, nothing more."

"If you say so...but you truly are a mystery, well then, I have a lot of work to do, let us talk later."

"Mhm."

The conversation between the two ended. He did not really want rumors of a no-name runesmith beating a tier 3 monster to leave the city. At least he didn't want it to be painted as a solo endeavor. Including the city soldiers and knights in the conversation would steer people away from him. Mentioning that he just made the trap that aided in the subjugation was enough to send more clients his way and that was enough for him.

Roland was left to tend to his broken home and body. The soldiers got on their horses and the five adventurers followed after them. The magician kept glancing at him while entering the forest which he wasn't sure what meant. During the conversation, he was sure that no one should have been able to hear him talk to the city lord. This didn't mean that it wasn't possible as there could exist a skill that went around all of his defenses.

'It shouldn't matter even if they heard it... unless they were sent by one of Arthur's brothers.'

He wasn't sure if this plan would work, they were in need of some competent personnel to set up the initial entrance. The issue of the Lich escaping was also out there, he could only attribute it to his mana corrupting the monster in some way. At least he would now be wary of oversaturating the monsters with his mana. It was possible that it was a unique variant and that it wouldn't happen again but it could also be the reverse.

'There might be other Liches like this one in there, I need to be careful but there are ways of keeping even a Lich like that in there...'

Roland looked at the destroyed gate and the rectangular-shaped hole before it. The trap that he constructed there was enough to even destroy a Lich. Considering that the undead monsters there were of lower levels than the one that crawled outside, it wouldn't be that hard to kill them if they managed to walk outside. They would just need to get enough divine crystals to make it work and perhaps soon he could just emulate the energy pattern and forgo those costly gems altogether.

"That is if the deal goes through, I should probably get to work..."

While the monster was dead this was not the end of it all. His home needed to be repaired and then perhaps he needed to prepare enough materials for the gate inside the dungeon. There was also the problem of some people besides Arthur knowing of the secret mining spot he occupied. A wave of trouble in the form of the dwarven union was probably approaching him but he didn't fear them anymore. With Arthur's name he could just deflect everything, if they were told that it was his order they would not be able to pin anything on him.

"I need to fix this hole first."

The place here became empty and after glancing at his map he could tell that no more unwelcome guests were coming. The soldiers didn't take the thief corpses with them due to the current situation so for now he decided to encase them in earth with the help of his magic.

His boots began glowing as he had to do a quick mend of the entire compound. The gate was broken and mangled but most of the walls were intact. For the time being, he decided to create a temporary fix by creating rock walls through his magic. These wouldn't last for long due to the way they were made but at least he wouldn't have a hole in his fence anymore.

"I should probably tell everyone that I'm alive, that explosion could probably be seen from the city walls."

First of all, everyone needed an update on his well-being, Elodia, Bernir and a few other people he knew would probably like to know if he didn't kick the bucket. His trusty assistant needed to get here as fast as he could as a lot of things needed to be repaired. The walls from earth needed to be exchanged with something sturdier and he also needed help creating a new forge.

After giving out a sigh he grabbed the misshapen box with the only working crystal ball inside and went into his home. There he informed Elodia about this current status and that it was safe to go outside.

"Thank the gods that you are safe but why aren't you coming to the city?"

"I can't leave this place without any protection, all of the golems were destroyed and the same goes for the turrets."

He did not want to lie to her in this situation but also not say that a group of thieves had already tried to rob him blind. The message was probably sent by now so he didn't expect any more burglars during the night but there was always a small chance that someone could seek revenge. He did not know who the people Agni killed were, there was always a possibility that they were related to someone up the totem pole.

"Are you going to stay there for the night? Wouldn't it be safer to return to the city, what if ..."

"Don't worry about that, no one is going to attack or try to rob me. They already lost the window of opportunity for that..."

He thought back to the three dead thieves that tried to get to his safe the moment the Lich had been killed. Now that the city soldiers were patrolling the outside of the city they wouldn't have another chance. Even though the night would soon fall upon them, adventurers would also be hired to scout out the areas. It wouldn't be easy to move during the night with so many people walking around, even less with a platinum adventurer party close by.

"The window of opportunity? Hey, are you hiding something?"

Roland could see Elodia fixing her glasses while leaning closer to the glass ball on her side. This made her head become a lot larger on his end and made him actually back off while evading her gaze. At the time being, he didn't want to mention that he had three dead people buried in his backyard waiting for some soldiers to pick them up.

Most of the time dead thieves would just be buried in shallow graves outside the city, so they might have even forced him to do that. The last time Bernir was left alone to defend the house he was forced to take care of the dead assailants himself.

“Whatever do you mean? Anyway... how about you visit the adventurers guild tomorrow and send in a request for protection, I could use someone to watch this place, I might have to leave soon and I can't leave Bernir and you alone here.”

If Arthur talked things out with the Platinum Adventurer Party and things went well, then he would need to go to the dungeon as a guide. Drilling through the entrance area would take some time and he would need to create a temporary entrance that couldn't be encompassed by the dungeon. The party of five would need to remain there and kill any potential skeletal fiends that would bother him.

“I could do that... but do you intend to leave somewhere?”

“There is a possibility... I uh.. I'll see you later, the mana is running out... don't forget to go to the adventurer guild tomorrow...I'll contact you later.”

“Hey!”

With a sigh, he turned off the device as he wasn't really in the mood of answering questions that he didn't want to answer. With that, he prepared for a night of sleeplessness as he needed to get the place in order. Even if he told Elodia that it was safe he wasn't quite sure about that, his escape route was still there so he felt rather secure.

“Hm... why do I have the feeling that I forgot about something... it wasn't probably that important if I forgot about it, come Agni.”

“Woof!”

So did the day end and the night continued without anything of note happening. On the next day, a few people visited that had been missing through most of the encounter. It was the party of four that had assisted him in the completion of his gold-rank quest and had remained uninvolved in his latest adventure.

“I've heard that you were looking for some guards?”

Senna waved at him while walking next to Elodia that appeared in the morning. It seemed that they decided to take up the latest request and with the four here he would probably be able to finish up what he started down in the dungeon.