

Runesmith 51

[Chapter 51 Nothing is real.](#)

Roland was standing in the middle of the corridor with his hand holding the blade that he previously made. He had looked at it many times before but this was a first.

Thanks to his debugging skill he was able to always see the runic structures of any item that he came across. If he focused on it the skill would show him various colored lines; red, blue, and green.

He had already seen how his blade should look while under his skill and something was very off. The traces were wrong, they didn't fit the sword that he made and this wasn't even the oddest thing here.

Roland moved his eyes up and glanced at the walls. He looked at the doors and even the ceiling. He could see them, traces were everywhere it was as if everything in here had runes inscribed into them.

He had come to this place many times and even used his skill before to glance at some items but nothing like this ever happened. Something was really wrong here, even the potted plant that was in the corner had runic components on it.

He quickly ran downstairs, he wanted to ask Zilyana if she noticed something. The moment he got downstairs he saw the elf just standing there, her body consumed by runic traces.

Roland backed away, the elf covered in runic symbols just looked at him and smiled.

"Oh? What's the rush? Are you sure that you don't want some tea?"

She giggled and gave him the brightest smile that she could. This only made Roland shake his head, he decided to leave the store for now.

On the outside it was all the same, magical pathways were littering the streets and the buildings. Even the sky was full of them. He deactivated his skill and shook his head side to side while trying to gather his thoughts.

The moment the skill wasn't active he saw the world as he normally did. Nothing looked out of place. He squatted down and touched the soil, he even picked some up and let it fall through his fingers.

This was strange indeed. Even without using his debugging skill, he should be able to somehow feel the runes in items. Without his debugging active he couldn't feel the characteristic mana signature that an active runic structure would give out.

'Illusion?'

His mind wandered in a certain direction as he reactivated his skill again. He now looked at the runic components that were around him. The structures were more advanced than anything he had ever seen.

'Grand...no...greater rune?' If it was a grand rune then it would be something on a tier 4 level. These structures were more advanced than common ones but not by that much, this had to be a greater runic structure.

He had diagrams on various runes, lesser and common. Depending on the type of spell the runes belonged to some of the components would repeat themselves. An ice arrow rune would share some components that an ice blast rune had. The same was in this situation as he recognized some of those structures.

Some of the runic formations looked similar to runes that had to do with illusions. There were also some that were from runes that affected the target's state of mind. He could see something similar to a sleep rune component just more intricate.

From his observations, he deduced that he had fallen victim to some kind of illusion spell. This world that he was seeing was not real, when it happened was a mystery though. He activated his skill when he was back at his workshop so it had to have happened after he left.

Was he attacked in the street or when he arrived at the company store?

Also why someone would even do this evaded him, did he get caught up in another mess of the gnome manager?

It had been one and a half years since the home invasion incident, he had almost forgotten about it till this moment. No item he had could protect him from a mental attack of this magnitude.

'Am I trapped in here?'

He looked around, his heart pounding fast. He had no idea what the person that put him in this illusion was doing outside. Was he holding a dagger to his throat while he was here unable to do anything?

With the skill activated he started looking around. Even though these runic structures were more advanced, they were still just runes. He had spent years studying them and he knew how to tell the pathways apart from each other.

There was always one prime rune, through which everything connected. Without that rune the whole spell would instantly collapse, maybe if he found it he could destroy or alter it. If he could damage these runic structures was still unclear but he didn't have much time for a test.

He could see some people walking around, looking at him. In this world he was alone and he didn't know if it had some kind of defensive mechanism. It would be unwise to alert his enemy to his knowledge, it was better to find the prime rune first and destroy it.

Roland could even see in what direction it was. There were many runic pathways going in one direction, in the direction of his workshop. This world of illusions was probably made from his memories and his workshop had most of them. He would probably find what he was looking for there.

He strapped his sword to his side. Even though it wasn't real it probably would work against the denizens of this world. He walked while slightly rushing, he could feel strange gazes on his back that were giving him the chills. Was there even anything behind him, or was it just the figment of his imagination?

The walk back to his workshop felt really long but he managed to arrive without anything out of the ordinary happening. He quickly opened up the entrance and ducked inside, closing the reinforced door right behind him and locking it.

He gave out a sigh and quickly quieted down. It was really silent in here, he couldn't hear anything outside either. He still wasn't sure what this illusion world was or how it operated. A runic item that could produce something like this must have been made with some high quality materials.

But where there was a runic artifact that was active, the caster was probably not far behind. Some items could be activated remotely and could even run on their own depending on the manufacturing process. There had to be someone to activate it unless he walked into some kind of trap that set it off instead.

Roland activated his debugging skill. The pathways converged into one spot, into his forge. The one he was using was made from bricks but now looked like a Christmas tree. There were various magical pathways some were quite red. Apparently, this greater rune wasn't quite perfect.

The pathways connected to a larger rune that was in the middle, this was the prime rune. It consisted of many other runic components that were inside a magic circle. This prime rune was on the inside of the circle right in the middle, the other runes and runic components were around it in another outer circle.

Roland moved towards the forge that was part of this illusion of a workshop. It was really convincing as he couldn't really notice a difference between this world and the real one, at all.

He placed his digit on one of the runic pathways and tried rubbing on it, this didn't achieve anything at all. Even when he grabbed a metal tool to scratch the brick material the magical pathway remained in place. It remained floating in the air instead of sinking back into the brick, it was as if the forge wasn't even there to begin with.

'I guess it won't be that easy...'

He moved his finger towards that magical pathway that he tried to rub off his forge. He injected some of his mana into his fingertip before moving towards the runic structure.

As a runesmith he was someone that was able to affect runic structures with his own mana. With the help of runecrafting he was able to repair runes but also destroy them. It was part of the process, you just removed the faulty components and replaced them with the good ones.

The moment he touched the trace and activated his skill he saw it crumbling apart. This was only one of the many that he had to remove before the whole structure became unstable. The moment he did this he could feel the earth trembling a bit, it was as if a small earthquake was taking place.

The magical pathway that he severed with his finger started to slowly mend itself back into shape. It seemed that this rune had some sort of self-repairing property but it was slow enough for him to continue his work.

The more pathways he destroyed the more the world shook. It was as if this illusion was reacting to his interference.

'I should probably hurry up...'

He thought to himself while getting a bad feeling. The pathways were slowly regenerating but he was able to sever them faster. After getting one of the larger components fully he could feel the whole workshop shake. The walls started cracking and the wooden beams strained themselves to hold the warehouse together.

He wasn't quite done yet as this prime rune was a lot more intricate than what he was used to. While he was going for another part he suddenly heard a knock on the door.

It started off quiet, like a normal everyday knock but soon turned to loud pounding. He didn't even look back to his door, he was convinced that this was some sort of defensive mechanism of this world. It had probably noticed that he was messing with the prime rune structure and it was now here to stop him.

He had no idea if there were some kind of rules in this illusion world. Though from the fact that the thing that was outside wasn't rushing in to stop him, there had to be something. The loud thumping sound stopped after a while and he continued with the rune destruction, that was until he heard a voice behind the door.

"Roland let me in, it's me!"

He jerked slightly after hearing the voice, he clearly recognized the owner of it.

"Helci?"

"Yes I've come back, please open the door, it's cold out here..."

He could clearly hear her, this world was somehow reaching into his memory and pulling out people that he would probably be willing to let inside his workshop. The moment of pause didn't stop him, he just grabbed the hammer that he was using for runesmithing.

Roland injected his mana into the tool and delivered a blow to his forge, the runic pathways and components quickly became distorted after the strong blow.

The 'Helci' outside started shouting frantically and the pounding on the door continued. He started sweating and continued with the destruction of this runic structure. It was a lot harder than he expected probably due to his skill being low compared to this intricate rune.

"Why won't you let us in!"

Another voice was heard by him, this time not at the door but a floor above by the window. He gazed at it momentarily and could see a female hand reaching through it.

This was the window that his half gnome assistant had once sneaked in. He had long since put an iron grate there, all of his windows were now barred as he really didn't want anyone climbing through them.

This hand and voice was different, it was very muscular and the voice sounded deeper but he still recognized it.

"Sahldr?"

It was the voice of his old party member and she wasn't alone. All the other windows in this warehouse were now occupied by some people that he previously knew. He could even hear the voice of his maid Martha. Anyone that had treated him nicely was apparently here.

This illusion world was trying to lower the defenses of the afflicted person with their loved ones. Most people were more willing to let their guard down around their friends. In this situation, though it looked like a bunch of zombies were trying to get inside and tear him apart.

Roland delivered another blow to the forge and saw the runes crack. All of the destruction was starting to affect this world. The shaking didn't stop and he could hear lightning bolts and loud wind outside. The wooden workshop began to also crack, this event caused the door to finally break.

He had destroyed most of the prime rune but time was running out. The Helci that was outside of the door started pushing herself in. The door was barely holding itself shut on the top hinge.

What he saw wasn't the assistant that he remembered though. Her body was contorting in odd ways and she looked like some kind of creature from a horror movie. Even though there wasn't much space to crawl through the monster Helci didn't care. It forced itself inside, its flesh coming undone and the outer layer of the skin remained outside the door while the monstrosity squeezed itself in.

Roland finally delivered another strike to the runic structure that caused the whole world to become unstable. The whole workshop tilted to the side and all of the blacksmithing tools flew off the shelves and tables.

The other monsters started bursting through the windows while the Helci one jumped forward. The part that would be its chest opened up to show a massive set of shark-like teeth. In the middle was what looked to be a giant tongue, the tongue split into many smaller tendrils and shot forward towards Roland.

Luckily for Roland this world still had rules in it, the tentacles rebounded off a semi-transparent red shield that caused those tendrils to burn. He wasn't far behind, he grabbed a magic paddle weapon that he had on his side and pointed it at the confused monster.

A large burst of flames in the form of an arrow shot out. The flame arrow flew at a high speed hitting the monster in the middle. The monstrosity exploded, chunks of guts and meat followed suit and covered the whole workshop in it.

The other monsters weren't far behind, they flung their tentacles at the shield of flames and continued to smack it until it broke.

Roland could feel something grabbing his legs, it didn't feel like anything human. He had no time as the monsters were upon him, he had to destroy this prime rune. He swung his hammer down while a sharp tendril pierced his chest at about the same moment.

He coughed up red and felt a metallic taste and the whole world began to distort even more. His eyes started getting blurry and everything went white as he passed out.

"....."

"....."

"....You should praise me, if it wasn't for me you'd never get through all these traps~"

Roland heard a voice, he gasped out for air but remained silent for the most part. He could feel that he was back in the store. He was sprawled out on the floor with his head towards an open door to the gnome manager's office. There were voices coming from there one was female and the other was male.

"Stop..."

“Wasting time?”

The woman finished the man’s sentence and Roland could hear footsteps coming towards him. He wasn’t sure what was happening at all, who were those two and how did they get in here. For now, he played dead, the people here probably thought that he was still affected by the illusion.

Next to him he could feel someone else, it was Zilyana and she had collapsed a bit further into the office.

“It’s not even that late, we have enough time to play around with these two.”

The woman proclaimed while grabbing Zilyana by her hair and lifting her up with one hand. The elf’s legs and arms were dangling around as if she was a ragdoll. She was clearly out cold, probably affected by the same mind-affecting spell.

He could hear Zilyana’s body getting dragged inside the gnome manager’s office. If the gnome was still alive or not he had no idea. He also noticed something, the man placed an item on a table before walking towards the woman who was dragging Zilyana along.

He could feel the strange mana signature of the thing on the table, it had to be the magical device responsible for this whole thing. He would probably only have one shot at this and he had to make it count.

He had made a better version of the magical paddle with his staple fire arrow spell. After getting the skill that helped him condense the runes he was able to achieve that. He had used it in the world of the illusion and he had it strapped to his belt as he always carried it as a backup weapon.

The easiest way to get the elf and the gnome to wake up would be to destroy that magical device. The explosion might also alert the guards. He could also try to run but he felt like the two people in this room were far stronger than him. He might not reach the end of the corridor before getting a dagger or something else stuck in his back.

He slowly moved his hand towards his belt and the magic weapon that was strapped to it. He just needed to be quiet and get a good shot in but if he failed, he would be a dead man...

[Chapter 52 Making a decision.](#)

The night was dark and the whole city was lit up by the light of the lanterns. The winds had picked up and it started to drizzle. It looked like it would be a cold, stormy night. The guards that were patrolling the city moved slowly, mostly keeping to the buildings and hiding from the rain.

In one of the better-off sections of the city was Exeor’s Magic Emporium. It was late and close to 9 pm now. Almost everyone had left the store and was now either at home or out in the pub. However, there was still light shining in the building, mostly through one window in particular.

This very window was getting closed by a man in a black robe. There was a collapsed gnome in the room next to some alchemy equipment. By the entrance door to this lab, there was a female elf. To normal people, she might have looked like a sun elf but this man saw through her disguise.

The man placed a double helix looking magical device on a nearby table after closing the window. The artifact gave off a red glow and the helixes revolved around each other while this item was active.

Besides these three there were two more people in close proximity. One was a tall human youth that was passed out close to the female elf. The other was another woman in a black robe that was similar to the one this man was wearing.

She was now bringing the passed out woman over. She did this by dragging her by her long hair. Her legs were dangling and her arms were flopping around without any strength in them.

“That toy always makes things so boring~”

The woman said while sighing, she tossed the passed out Zilyana into the room while complaining.

“Do not talk about our lord’s artifact in such a way! It is a blessing from the Lord of the Abyss.”

The man replied in a monotone voice while glaring at his partner in crime. The woman had her hood down so you could see her smiling widely after the man got mad.

“I wouldn’t dare, our Lord is truly merciful”

The woman shrugged while replying, her tone indicating a hint of mockery. The two clearly had different views about this lord they were speaking of.

“Can we at least take their bags, they won’t be needing them.”

The woman smirked while pointing to the bags that both the gnome and the elf had on their sides. The man didn’t answer and that was enough for the obsidian skinned elf to move closer. She took out an intricate-looking dagger and pointed it towards the unmoving bodies of the gnome and elf.

Unbeknownst to the two the third person that was there was quite awake. The tier 1 class holder that was there didn’t seem like a threat to these two assassins. They were preoccupied with the target and his hidden guard to pay attention to the sleeping youth. This would turn out to be one of the biggest mistakes that they could have made.

Roland waited patiently, he started moving his hand towards his belt where he had one of his magical wands attached. They still looked like pieces of wide metal with a handle. After getting the knack of steel weapons he had created one that could support his fire arrow spell.

There were some downsides in making a weapon like this. The charges a regular steel weapon could hold was limited. Even with the highest rune quality and the help of the rune compression skill at most he could squeeze out ten charges.

The runic components would erode afterward. That is also why he kept the paddle-like design, with the added thickness and wide shape he could repair it more often. After each repair, some of the material would be lost but these wands didn’t need to keep an edge so it was fine.

Finally, he saw the opportunity to strike. The woman pulled out her dagger and started going for the bags of holding. He grasped his weapon and was ready to point it at the strange artifact that was radiating with an unusual mana signature.

The man in the black robe didn’t look like he would be waiting much more. He moved his hand up and Roland could hear some strange cracking noises, it was as if bones were being broken. He had to act now, he knew that this was probably the only way he would survive.

These two were far above him in levels, he didn't think that he would be able to make it down the corridor if he ran. He would probably get stabbed by the strange black looking elven woman. She looked like the speedy type and agility was the stat that Roland lacked the most.

He knew that Zilyana wasn't what she seemed. She was the only person that could get him out of this bind. He also wasn't sure how strong the gnome was in a fight but he also could have a trick up his sleeve.

There was a slight delay with the spell activation. To be on the safe side he needed to inject his mana before aiming with his steel wand. The downside of this was that he couldn't focus on his target before activating his weapon. He had no choice though as otherwise, he might lose the element of surprise.

"Hm?"

A large thick tentacle rose from the man's long sleeve but stopped midway. He was about to devour the gnome that was on the floor. He had carried him over here and placed him next to the elven woman. He wanted to order his accomplice to carry the last person over here but before that could happen he noticed a new mana signature. Someone was clearly activating a spell or a magical item.

The man's class was an Abyssal Warlock, a prestige class that needed some special steps to unlock. He was someone that was proficient in transformation magic, he could transform his body into many abyssal monstrosities. He was also someone that started just like every other magic caster, as a tier 1 mage.

He possessed all the magic-related skills and traits. He had noticed the shift in mana around Roland's body but it was already too late. He had believed in the artifact, it had never failed him before. Even this tier 3 elven woman and gnome had fallen to its might.

Only people with specialized classes that were resistant against abyssal illusion magic would be able to resist it. The youth that was there didn't fit the criteria, he didn't even have a tier 2 class. Yet somehow there he was, pointing a piece of metal at the artifact that this man was so proud of.

The Abyssal warlock's eyes glowed in a red color and he pointed his large tentacle at the magical device. He was trying to defend it, what the youth was planning was clear.

The thick tentacle flew to block the path of the fiery arrow but it was too late. The mass of fire elemental energy slammed into the double helix-shaped item. The artifact wasn't built with defensive measures in mind so it shattered into many tiny pieces along with the table that it was on.

"Nooooooooo!"

The man wailed in a strange deep voice as he watched his artifact being destroyed. The woman that was with him was already next to the perpetrator. She had vanished from her spot and instantly appeared with her dagger above him, ready to deliver a killing blow.

Without giving him much time to react, Roland turtled up. Right after firing the fire arrow spell he instantly activated every protective item on his person. He had many magic shield type runic spell scrolls on himself just for such an occasion.

His body was covered by various elemental shields, fire, wind, water, and earth. He was encased in many layers of common grade magical shields. The woman didn't falter with her attack, her face showed a ghastly wide grin.

The dagger flew down and started going through the protective barriers like through butter. Only after passing the fourth one did it start slowing down. Roland continued activating more shields in hopes of stalling her. His true objective wasn't to defend himself from this attack, it was to give the people in this room time to react.

The biggest problem was that he didn't know how long that would take. He was putting his life in other's hands yet again. He had a theory that Zilyana wasn't just a simple shop clerk. She stuck too close to this gnome and he never saw any bodyguards around. Either the gnome was strong himself or this woman was the one defending him. His theory would be now put to the test and he really hoped that he was right.

The last barrier finally shattered and the dagger poked through. It went right into his shoulder as he was given enough time to shift himself to the side.

The pain was excruciating, he couldn't help himself from screaming. The woman's eyes turned into two crescent moons and it looked like she was enjoying herself.

"Naughty boy."

She said while twisting the dagger that had cleanly penetrated through Roland's scapula bone, it had even reached the floor behind it.

A myriad of notifications sounded out. His HP had dropped by a third just from this one hit and if he looked he would see it ticking down continuously. The weapon the woman was using was clearly meant for killing, even if she didn't finish the job the poison and curse status would probably be his undoing.

Luckily due to the woman's nature, he wasn't quite dead yet. She wasn't like the Abyssal Warlock who did his killing proficiently. No, she on the other hand liked to toy with her targets.

"Naughty children need to be punished~."

She yanked out the blade from Roland's shoulder and aimed it for the other one. Now that she had the chance, she would play with her prey.

The warlock had also momentarily spaced out. The shock of losing a holy artifact, a symbol of his faith wasn't something that could be easily forgotten. But, it was gone and the targets hadn't been eliminated yet.

"Kill him now! We can't waste time!"

He shouted while turning his tentacle towards one of the bodies on the ground. To his dismay, both of them were missing. He quickly looked around, his skin shifting color as he got ready to receive an attack. Then he heard it, the voice of his accomplice shouting.

He turned his head to the door where the youth that destroyed his magical artifact was. His partner in crime had been attacked from behind, she was too focused on the boy to react fully. She now had a large gash on her side, obsidian colored blood coming out of it while she backed away.

“yOu BiTcH!”

The Warlock heard her shout but turned to another location. He had his own problem to combat, the gnome he was here to kill was now missing. It was as if he vanished but he clearly wasn't someone versed in teleportation magic. Even if the boy and that elven woman survived it wasn't a problem but if the gnome got away they would fail their mission.

The man quickly activated various detection skills and spells that he knew. To no avail, this wasn't his forte; he was more of a fighter. The gnome had to be here, he was probably using some kind of skill or item to hide his presence.

The man moved his hands forward, tentacles shooting out and splitting into many smaller ones. They looked like long whips with pointy claws at the ends. If he couldn't see him he would destroy this entire room and the whole building with it.

Roland at this time was coughing up blood on the floor. Zilyana had swooped in for the save at the last moment but he was having a hard time staying awake. The moment the dagger was pulled out the paralyzation effect subsided but the curse and poison status didn't. He did the only thing that he could and started crawling down the corridor a trail of his blood following him.

He heard two women shouting profanities behind him and strange whip-like noises. His plan of waking up Zilyana and the gnome had worked but he still got stabbed. He needed to get an antidote and find a priest to remove this curse, if not he would die.

He had some healing potions in his own bag but the lesser antidotes weren't working. Luckily this was a shop owned by an alchemist, there were more powerful potions downstairs.

He managed to crawl up to the stairs, even while drinking his potions constantly his health was still going down. His legs felt like they were made from lead as he slowly wobbled down the stairs, almost falling down at the last step.

He stumbled and ravaged through the glass cases. There were various potions out behind this glass so that the customers could look over them. He didn't care if he would need to pay for it later he needed to survive first.

When his health was at about 20% he finally got to the antidote section of the store. He tried bashing the glass open but his attack bounced right off.

“Fuck...”

He backed away and took out his wand, this glass wasn't something that would easily break. He had forgotten this fact while panicking downstairs. He needed a key to get there but he didn't think that he would find it.

He pointed at the case with the potions in them and a fire arrow spell rushed forth. It collided with the glass but didn't shatter it. Roland continued pelting his target with his spells while his health continuously ticked down.

The steel paddle wasn't designed to take this much mana and the metal started heating up. He bit his bottom lip and continued, finally after the sixth try he had managed to melt a hand-sized hole through the partially magic resistant glass.

He frantically lunged forward and grabbed one of the higher grade antidotes. The purple-colored liquid made its way into his mouth. Following this, he swallowed another healing potion before collapsing to the ground.

He slumped back while looking at his status screen. He could barely make out the numbers but his decreasing health started to slow down.

He didn't have much time to rest though. A large number of tendrils burst through the ceiling and started wreaking havoc on the level he was on. The whole building started shaking as the battle upstairs continued.

"I need to get out of here..."

His shoulder didn't stop hurting and his knees felt weak. He had gotten over the poison part and the bleeding was slowly stopping thanks to all the healing potions he had drunk. The only problem was that the wound was starting to take on a black coloring.

The curse still remained and he needed to either find himself a priest or a blessed elixir. Curses like this one varied and most of the time worked at a slower rate compared to poisons. They could cause various effects like dementia and madness to boot.

He started walking towards the exit while at the same time trying not to get impaled on the tentacle whips. It looked like the warlock above was really going after the gnome. The continued tentacle strikes indicated that he was proving to be a hard target to hit.

Roland finally reached the door outside and tumbled down to the ground as his legs gave out. He clutched his injured shoulder that was still hurting and looked at the store.

It looked like a horror show, there were massive squiggly tentacles bursting out through the walls everywhere. Monstrous screams filled the surroundings and made his whole body shiver in fright. The whole building was coming down, he could only watch and hope that the people inside would be alright.

The screaming and shouting finally brought the city guards over. They were a lot faster this time around compared to when he got his old workshop invaded. Probably because this was a better part of the city.

They were just in time to behold the Abyssal Warlock in all his glory. The person bursts out through the ceiling without looking like anything human. He had a vaguely humanoid shape, his hands had turned to claws and his shoulders were bulky. On those shoulders were massive eyes that blinked and twitched in every direction.

To Roland's surprise, the man wasn't chasing after Zilyana or the manager. There was someone similar, a moon elf male battling this gruesome monster. The two left a partially collapsed building and their battle continued outside.

He couldn't see Zilyana and the other woman anywhere. If they were battling in the shadows someplace else or were still in the building was a mystery.

The guards surrounded the area and even more, people started appearing. The company probably had some backup henchmen for such an occasion.

Roland just felt like a deflated balloon. He felt the adrenaline leaving his body which made it hard to stay awake.

He had somehow survived this but he was left with a bad taste in his mouth. He felt like if he was stronger this wouldn't have been the case.

There was one big thing on his mind now.

'I need to leave this city...'

He had been involved in two assassination attempts now. None of them were directly his fault, they were all squabbles between other people.

This was unacceptable, the lack of control over his own life was pushing him in a certain direction. He needed personal strength, he didn't think that he could depend on others anymore.

Luckily this was a clear breach of contract. The company had failed to protect him and this wound was proof. Where he would be heading was still up for consideration but he had a couple of cities in mind. All of them, ones with dungeons and new opportunities.

First, he needed to get this curse in check. The veins on his neck were turning black just like this wound, he was in dire need of a high priest.