

Runesmith 155

[Chapter 155 Black market hospitality.](#)

Roland found himself face to face with a member of the Ratfolk race. This race of sentient rat people was known for living underground and shying away from the sun. There weren't that many of them around but whenever the black market was involved they were there.

They were a race of mostly stealthy merchants. Most of their people were poised at hiding which allowed them to sneak through the night unnoticed. While their bodies didn't allow them to be the best warriors they were good at subterfuge and espionage.

Many of the information guilds had a good relationship with them as they were quite good at spying. Their enhanced hearing skills allowed them to listen in on various conversations while being unnoticed during the night. It wasn't surprising that Roland managed to find one of them here, if he would get a good price was still up to debate though.

"Yes, that deepsilver ingot and that durium... how much?"

"The 'uman has an eye for quality! Skeek will give him a good price!"

Through the years of living in this world, Roland had also gone through a few stores. Even though this was the black market the bartering was not much different.

After going back and forth he managed to get the ingot's price down that was only about 10% over its regular market value. While normally he would not take any materials over the market price he didn't really have a choice.

What he could do now, was either shake on it and pay or look around some more to see if other merchants gave him a better price. This could bite him in the behind though, if there were no other merchants selling metal ingots, this rat here could increase the price further.

This was a basic tactic from all merchants. Watching the potential customers to see how much they were willing to pay was something they did. This market here wasn't that large so it wouldn't be hard to figure out that he was here for the crafting materials.

"This as far as Skeez will go, you buyin?"

"Fine, you got a deal."

This time around Roland decided to take a small hit to his purse. While getting some of the resources he also started asking some questions. He was only getting a couple of ingots and some ores but this would not be enough for him and Bernir to produce much. What he needed was a constant supply of these metals, not just a random ingot here and there.

It was a bit too early to strike a long-lasting deal with the first person that he was doing business with. It would be better for him to stake this place out and see how the prices fluctuate. With what he got today he would be able to make a few items that could fetch a good price.

While the dwarven union was trying to keep him from selling, he wasn't sure if they would be able to bribe or blackmail everyone.

It wouldn't be odd if he could find a proper merchant that would be fine with taking some of his stock and selling it in a different city. The other options that he had were doing it here on the black market and then using his own shop where he could earn the most.

The only thing required to create a shop was owning or renting the land that it was on. From what he could tell the union did their business in a legit way. They did use tactics that were considered legal by pricing out their opposition.

This was something that Bernir confirmed as well. The dwarves were somewhat prideful and would not use force to get rid of the competition. Thus he should not see any hired ruffians visiting his store to mess it up. At most, they would try to smear his image by trying to discredit his craft.

Luckily for him, that would not be that easy as his runic weapons were already spread through Albrook. Some of the weapons and armor that was given to him for repairs was made by him.

After getting some of the materials that he needed Roland spent the rest time looking around the black market. This was a good time for his analyzing and mathematical skills to shine. With their help, he started identifying the wares that were being sold along with their prices.

Thanks to his high intelligence stat he was able to easily remember the current market prices and compare them to these wares. He expected to find that everything was somewhat over the normal price but he was surprised that there were a lot of items below it.

There were probably various reasons for these prices, one of them being if they were stolen or not. A stolen good could be sold for a lot less and the merchant could still make a profit. The thieves mostly dumped their items to these merchants here at a low price and depending on the deal it reflected what they cost here.

Besides the rat person, Roland did manage to spot a few other merchants that could provide him with crafting materials. The prices didn't vary that much as the people here were probably aware of what they could get away with.

The biggest issue was to get himself a steady stream of materials. Going between three merchants that would probably constantly barter the prices up would be a headache. If he could actually get a proper steady supplier was still up to debate.

'I guess I should head home.'

After going through all the vendors and their wares Roland now had a good idea about this black market. There was a clear focus on shady weapons as daggers and poison was even sold as a bundle. If he managed to figure out a poison rune of some kind he would probably be able to sell assassination tools like hotcakes here.

For now, he was eyeing one of the archer stalls which possessed arrows dipped in paralyzing liquid. Making runic arrows required special mana conductive wood but it would actually be possible for him to get it.

Down in the dungeon, there were some special trees that were able to survive the blistering hot environment. Arrows that could be given magical effects could be made from it.

Previously he ignored them as he was easily able to use the guild connections to fashion runic swords instead that sold for more. Now on the other hand he could use that as a side job if he ever decided to push his item onto this market.

He still had to think this through as he wasn't sure if he wanted one of his creations being used to kill innocent people. Normally his weapons and armor were made with the intent of fighting monsters.

But he did not fool himself into believing that the people using them would only use them for the intended purpose. He would be surprised if some of his runic scrolls were already used to kill some innocent people instead.

While thinking about what he should do he started looking at the people here. It was somewhat loud as the merchants and customers were furiously bartering with each other.

'It's a lot more peaceful than I expected.'

Roland was still a bit on edge but after going through this 'marketplace' a few times he realized that it wasn't much different than the one on the surface. There were surprisingly fewer thieves here than above ground. It seemed that these people at least didn't steal from each other.

He also used his identification skill on the people here. While most of them were wearing similar trinkets to him that blocked him from seeing their names, some didn't. Was this just the barrier between the ones that had more money or did they trust that the people here would not give them away.

From what he knew there was some honor between thieves but he only knew what other adventurers told him. Apparently, the thieves would not steal from each other at least when being down here nor would they report each other to the city guards. If there was an issue between them they would clear it up in their own way.

It seemed that they didn't trust the powers that run their kingdom and had their own version of the king as well. There were many guilds spread through this kingdom and the others. On the very top existed someone called the shadow king that no one actually knew the identity.

It was apparently the strongest thief guild member and he was apparently comparable to the top class holders in the land. If it was true or just a tale to keep the rowdy thieves in check was anyone's guess. Maybe if he stayed here longer he would be given the answers.

He soon ended up with the map that showed him the places that he could exit through. It wasn't drawn too well but it was very easy to read. It was clear that it was made with simplicity in mind as the exits were drawn in with red circles while the dead ends with red exes.

While this was only the black market portion of the underground there still was the thieves guild down here. Roland could see a tunnel leading in one direction and it was guarded by several thuggish-looking people. Sometimes they let people in but he never saw anyone go out and they always gave off an aura of hostility when they were approached.

'Could be where the thief's guild is being constructed... or maybe it's the place where they store the stolen goods?'

It would be nice to know what was past that corridor he was not in a hurry to get himself killed. Now came the time to leave so he followed the map to the closest exit spot. It took a moment for him to register the exit route as even though the map was easy to read there were a lot of winding tunnels that could confuse someone that was here for the first time.

After entering the tunnel he started walking. With a slow pace, he continued towards his destination. After five minutes of walking, he noticed something that he had been worried about.

‘Someone is following me...’

This was what he was afraid would happen after he descended into the black market. It was the first time for him and he didn’t have any real connections. The guild master gave him a warning that something like this could happen if he stood out too much.

Probably spending a prolonged time looking over all of the black market merchants put a nice sign on his back. It wasn’t hard to pick out someone that was out of their element. Even more when the people around were trained thieves whose job was robbing people.

Roland increased his pace as he realized that someone was trailing behind. While underground he would be forced to fight if he managed to get to the exit the people following him would be unable to do anything. It also could have been someone that was heading towards the same exit.

He was wearing a set of runic half-plate armor under this black robe. On his side, he had a sword that could also produce magical effects that he had made. The only thing that he was missing was a shield that was a bit too bulky to take along down here.

Then when going past a corner he came to a halt. Before him stood a robed figure with their mouth covered. The light was quite dim here as nothing else than one torch on the wall was illuminating this corridor.

“What do we have here? Fresh blood?”

The person started talking and the voice was not something that he recognized. Almost instantly he tried retreating but the path behind him became blocked by two other people.

“Where do you think you are going?”

It was another male voice but from the tone, he noticed that it probably belonged to someone younger. Next to this person stood someone a bit shorter and with a bow in hand. From the robed figure, he could tell that it was probably a woman.

“What do you want?”

He asked while using the item that masked his voice. Due to going down into the den of the thieves he was sure to make it sound somewhat menacing. Even then the person in front of him didn’t seem convinced and continued.

“What do we want he asks.”

The person that was behind him started laughing along with the one that was talking. The girl with the bow continued to point it without moving a muscle. That is until he laid his eyes on her and he could see her twitch slightly. It felt that she was not used to this kind of thing.

Even though he was surrounded he wasn't scared that much as he could somewhat tell that all these three people were below his own level. Their names were masked by something but he could see that the highest level person here was the archer, and she was just a tier 2 class holder.

"Give us your purse and you can pass, if not then we'll have to take it by force."

The hooded person proclaimed while also pulling out a nice-looking dagger. Now Roland had a decision to make, would he fight or give these people his items. He was not someone that shied away from conflict and he was also wearing a set of his own crafted armor.

"How about I give you a proposition instead?"

He replied while looking at the person that was probably the leader.

"Oh?"

"We'll forget that this ever happened and you get to keep your lives."

"Hah, we got a tough guy here!"

The person in front of him didn't seem to be taken back by his reply as he just laughed. Roland knew that they wouldn't be backing away without him showing his hand. Thus while the person was still talking he raised his hand in his direction.

While his palm was going up a green glow burst forth from under his robe. The thief in front saw this and tried to quickly move to the side but the spell that Roland was using wouldn't allow for such a thing.

The spell that was used caused a burst of green wind energy to fly towards the person brandishing the dagger. Due to the lack of space in this corridor, the thief had no place to dodge and he was sent flying in the opposite direction.

"S-shit..."

While the man in front of him was blown away the other male behind him started shouting.

"Fuck, get him!"

The archer woman stalled for a moment but then quickly released the arrow from her bow. It was a good shot that went straight for his thigh. Before the arrowhead connected with his leg though a burst of fiery energy incinerated it on the spot.

It was a simple tier 2 fire shield spell that was engraved on his chest plate. With his runic skills working he was able to shift through spells with no casting required. A normal mage would quickly be piled on by these three thieves here but Roland was not a simple mage.

With another burst of green energy, the two people behind him were sent flying and collided with the wall behind them. There was enough power in this tier 2 wind blast spell to knock the wind out of the two.

This gave him enough time to gather mana for a more lethal spell. In front of his hand, an orb of red light started forming which expanded to a large ball of fire. While he did not intend to kill anyone here, sending a message to the thieves guild that they should not attack him would be in order.

It was clear to him that these people would only take him seriously if they knew that he could not be trifled with. But, before shooting the ball of flames at the two people he noticed something.

Due to the windblast that he produced the hood was blown off the woman's head. It revealed her face and somewhat elongated ears. Roland had to stop himself from blowing this ball of fire into this girl that he knew. This didn't mean that he canceled the spell altogether as she would need to explain herself before he would let her off the hook.

"Lobelia? What do you think you are doing?"

[Chapter 156 Underworld dealings.](#)

"I'm truly sorry Wayland, if I knew it was you, ... please forgive me and these idiots!"

"Hey, who are you calling an idiot!"

"Put your head down you dimwit, do you want to die?"

Roland was now looking at the three people that attacked him. All three of the thieves turned up to be Lobelia and her friends. It seemed that the half-elven girl was actually part of the thieves guild.

"Also please don't tell this to big sis... or that big idiot... they will kill me... uh, that is if you don't do it now..."

Lobelia peeked her head up to look at Wayland that had lowered his hood a bit. He was still wearing his mask which would protect him from any gas attacks that these thieves could try to employ.

"I'm not going to kill you, but you'll have to explain a few things to me..."

"Yes! I'm very good at explaining things!"

While Roland somewhat knew Lobelia he wasn't so sure about the other two that were with her. For now, he continued to point his hand on them, a small orb of fire was still there and he had no problem in keeping it there.

"First, why did you try to rob me, didn't you see this?"

Roland pointed to the small emblem that he was given by the bartender at the brothel. This symbol that he attached to his robe was supposed to get him through the thieves guild without a problem. After the guards saw it they did allow him to trade and the merchants didn't have a problem in interacting with him after taking a glance.

"Ah, well..."

Lobelia shifted his head to the side and glared at one of the two young men. Both of them looked to be of mixed races. One had long animal ears that made him seem similar to a fox but was lacking a tail. The other one had floppier ears that were more dog-like.

Sometimes it was hard to tell them apart but most of the time they had less animalistic features. Pure beastmen had more animal-like faces along with fur below their knees and on their forearms. Their fingers also had sharp claws or talons depending on the beast tribe.

These two on the other hand mostly looked like regular humans with some added accessories. He could also use his analyzing skill to see their race after the scuffle they had.

“Well... that’s just a black merchant insignia... but you didn’t have any bodyguards with you, so we thought you would be an easy target.”The young man with fox ears was the one to reply.

“Renny, I told you that you got ripped off with that thing!”

Apparently, the dog boy was named Renny as the young fox man started talking to him in an angry tone.

“I’m sorry Jasper, but the magician said that it should work!”

Renny slumped his head down even more while Jasper started berating him. Roland on the other hand raised his brow and gave another question.

“That thing? Could you elaborate?”

“I’m sorry Wayland, I’ll explain, you two be quiet.”

This time around Lobelia replied and gave him a more detailed explanation. The thing that the young man was talking about was an identification eyeglass that was supposed to measure a person’s level and present their stats.

Apparently, the young thieves started examining him as he was acting a bit suspicious. The readings that the magic item gave them put him down at a lower level than them. Thus they decided to try their luck and rob him.

“We never intended to hurt you, we would have just taken the money, that’s all...”

Roland frowned but it went unnoticed as he was wearing a mask. While he believed Lobelia as he wasn’t so sure about the other two. During the fight, the half-elf did aim her bow lower towards his legs. The arrow also was coated in some kind of paralyzing agent.

The story somewhat checked out as after he was paralyzed they would be able to rob him blind. If they would have left it at that was anyone’s guess.

It did look like the item that he received from his old gnome boss was still working. It was not a runic item thus he could not examine it. From his testing, he found out that it gave various readings depending on one’s skill level and even time of day.

Sometimes it showed him as a totally different class. Other times it would block out the text from showing at all while on different occasions it would present the status window all jumbled up. It appeared that for these three he showed up as a low level merchant which made him appear as an easy target.

“You didn’t think that I was wearing an item that blocks people from seeing my status?”

“It did cross our minds... but we thought that we could still escape from one person...”

Lobelia laughed a bit while slowly sitting up. Roland had slowly started moving his hand to the side as he didn't really intend to kill these three. This didn't mean that he would just let it be, they did try to rob him and for that, they would need to pay.

"You two can leave, but you Lobelia, we need to have a talk."

While he was somewhat annoyed that they attacked him, it seemed like this would actually be something he could profit from. Just as he had an emblem for black market merchants these three had their own. He wasn't quite sure what rank these three had but they were clearly members of the thieves' guild.

"Lobelia... are you going to be alright..."

Renny asked her while looking at Roland. This didn't go unnoticed as he realized that the two young men were somewhat apprehensive about letting Lobelia be left alone with him.

"It's fine, I know him, I'll be fine. Just go back and say that everything is alright."

The two nodded and looked at Roland with a bit of a glare. This stare down he returned in full as he didn't move his eyes away. Ever since coming to this world, Roland noticed that showing weakness would get him nowhere. Thus he kept eye contact which made Jasper the fox man flinch slightly before vanishing behind the corner.

"First... let us get out of here and then we will have a long talk..."

Lobelia gave Roland a weak smile and the two continued through the path to the nearest exit. On the wall there was a lever and after lowering it the wall shifted in a similar fashion as in the brothel. The two ended up in some kind of basement that was filled with some old tools.

"First time?"

"Is it that obvious?"

Roland replied to the question as he was clearly slow with walking up towards this strange basement. Lobelia showed him how to leave it and the two found themselves in the backyard of some house in the city.

"There are many places that are associated with the underground like this."

"You mean the thieves' guild, does that signify that you are part of it."

Roland pointed to Lobelia's emblem that was in the shape of a kite with a circle in the middle. It was different from the one that he received which meant that she was not part of the underground merchants like him now.

"You are right, this is a sign of my rank..."

Roland wanted to ask about the thieves' guild ranking system but they were still dressed in their robes while being in someone's backyard. The person was apparently affiliated with the guild but this didn't mean that he wanted to stay here.

The two soon left and removed their clothes along with the emblems that were put into spatial bags. Then they went to the closest tavern as Roland insisted on getting more information from Lobelia's lips.

While Lobelia gave out a sigh, Roland was quite happy. He had no way of knowing about the inner workings of the thieves' guild. It was a secret organization that didn't write down its rules but went by word of mouth. With someone that was a member here, he could get all the information that he needed. Maybe he could even use her to get a better deal on the black market.

"I won't ask you about why you would be in a place like this... but by what you said, you would like me to not tell Elodia about it?"

"Please, don't tell big sis!"

Before he could even ask the first question Lobelia had a loud outburst. It seemed that Elodia was her weak point, it was clear that there was something personal there which Roland didn't really want to poke his face into. This didn't mean that he couldn't use this to get more info out of Lobelia.

"I won't if you answer my questions, don't leave anything out."

Lobelia sat down while blushing a little bit as her outburst got some of the other tavern patrons to look their way.

"Sorry about that, what do you want to know?"

"I would like you to give me some information about the thieves' guild and about the black market, if you're a member you must know the people that trade there..."

Roland started with an explanation of his problem. He made Lobelia aware that he was looking into the black market for trading. He wanted to know which of the merchants were somewhat trustworthy and for what he needed to watch out for.

It was clear that he made a mistake by looking like a fish out of water the first time he was there. Thankfully the only people that came for him were guild members that he could handle. Normal people would probably not be able to fight off three tier 2 ruffians in a narrow corridor as he did.

Lobelia started listing down the guild's secrets without going into too much detail. She also made it clear that as a guild member she was somewhat limited to what she could say.

This was similar to the contracts with the debuffs though here on the other side the thieves' guild use more drastic measures with curses. If she started listing the names of the leaders she would find herself affected by some kind of flesh-eating curse.

The only way to get rid of this high-level curse was to move up in the ranks and become one of the trusted members. Becoming a tier 3 class holder was one of the ways of getting rid of it for good. There was also nothing limiting the thieves' guild members from traveling, they were mostly free but just couldn't talk about the guild to non-members.

While their lips were sealed when talking about the more intricate secrets with outsiders this didn't keep them from discussing it among other members. Luckily Roland had acquired the black merchant emblem which would allow Lobelia to talk about it with him without being in danger of a curse backlash.

First, he got some information about the timeline. The underground had not been there for long as the construction had been started a few months ago. The black market had not even existed for longer than a month and he was informed that it was still in its infancy.

“Is that so, do you know any merchants that could take more specific custom orders? Is such a thing possible?”

“I don’t see why not, the black market isn’t really that much different than the one above ground. Perhaps the disputes are handled differently...”

“How so?”

There was less bureaucracy down there and the guild didn’t care about keeping the peace as much. All the black merchants paid taxes to the guild and mostly had to also use their own bodyguards for protection.

This was also why he was singled out from the crowd as a potential robbery target. Even if he went back to complain he would only be laughed out by the guild top brass. Then he would probably get robbed by them for being a bother.

The talk continued for a bit till it went back to the black market. There Lobelia mentioned a name that he was familiar with.

“I should trade with Skeek?”

“Definitely, those rat people like shiny things like metal and sparkly ores, that’s what you are looking for, right? If you ask him to get you something, he probably will, I wouldn’t really get involved with the other merchants, most of them are crooks. You better watch out a lot of them will try to sell you counterfeit goods.”

It was a bit strange to hear someone that tried to rob him call others crooks but apparently Skeek’s was the person he should invest his time in. The biggest downside of this whole black market deal was that he would need to do it himself. It would be hard to get Bernir down there without some protection.

“You said that a merchant needs protection down there, otherwise they could be picked off like me today, right?”

Lobelia nodded while Roland rubbed his chin and looked at her with intent. While he could probably go down there without protection this wasn’t the same for others. Bernir would be able to get him the required items if he had the right guide.

“Think I heard enough.”

“W-will you keep your word...”

“About not telling it to Elodia? Are you sure you can keep up this lie?”

Roland didn’t want to pry too much in but if he was in Elodia’s shoes he would like to know about his little sister’s involvement in the thieves guild. From his standpoint, the girl was probably afraid that she would be banned from participating in the thieves’ guild activities.

“She wouldn’t understand... we need the money and even if it does look bad, I promise that I haven’t killed anyone!”

Roland recalled the bowmanship that Elodia performed. It didn’t seem that she was aiming for a killing blow, the intent was to injure and not to kill. This didn’t mean that he was fine with what she was doing.

This world was different than his old one, his old morals didn’t really apply to people that were starving and living in poverty. It was easy to tell someone not to steal but when family and friends were on the line, the lines of what was right and wrong became blurred.

“I won’t tell her, but on one condition.”

Lobelia perked up at the first part of the sentence but her brows furrowed the moment the latter part was mentioned.

“Yes, you do remember Bernir, right?”

“You mean that perverted drunk?”

“Yes, that does sound like him, what I would like you to do is...”

Roland started giving his terms. There wasn’t really much that he wanted, Elodia was only supposed to act as Bernir’s bodyguard whenever he needed her to be. If he had a member from the thieves’ guild on his side there would be no problem in sending him to get materials.

She would also be tasked with showing him around. The whole underground life was very new to him. It would be good to figure out how things worked and how he could use it to his advantage.

This was a very critical moment in his life as he was expanding his knowledge and wealth would come with it. If he could get some protection via the local mafia then it might be a good idea to lose some gold. But if it was worth the hassle was the big question here.

From what his friend here told him, the thieves’ guild did make contracts with outsiders. If he could trade some money for their protective services and not be ripped off, then it might be a good idea. Until he got an operational golem and tower defensive system this could save him some trouble.

The biggest problem here was trust, trust that he did not really have. Would these thieves keep their end of the bargain or would they try to squeeze him for more and more cash? Would they actually get involved if he got attacked or would they just ignore his plight when the time came to act?

“I could do that but how long would that take?”

“It would be best if we didn’t need to go there too much, is once every two weeks fine?”

Lobelia nodded at the request and they shook on it. They agreed to meet up later and she would show him the ropes. Now it was time to head home as it was already nighttime. If he showed his face the guards would let him leave as they knew him well.

‘I hope this won’t be more trouble than it’s worth... I need to get stronger.’”

Roland gave out a sigh while walking towards the city gates. While it seemed that he would be able to get some crafting materials, working with the black market was still not something he was looking towards.