

Runesmith 179

Chapter 179: Sneaking around the city.

“Excuse me, could I take a look at that sword there?... Hello?”

“Oh, my apologies, which sword did you want?”

Two women were talking with each other, both of them were wearing glasses. One of them was wearing a somewhat intricate-looking uniform that made her look like a maid from an Aristocat’s house. The other lady was wearing hardened leather armor and had protruding ears which were synonymous with a member of a beast tribe.

The girl from the beast tribe looked at the short sword that she was handed. There was a string attachment at the hilt that she had never seen before in any other store. A piece of paper was glued to this string, on it was the description of what this magical item was. Normally the shops didn’t go into this much detail about their wares and a person needed to ask the clerk for a full description.

“I see that you have noticed it already, each item is categorized and also has a short description, if you decide on a purchase we also include a small instruction manual.”

“Instruction manual?”

The girl in the leather armor looked over the weapon and the description. On the small piece of paper, it said that this weapon was an Aether Deepsteel shortsword, with a dual runic enchantment.

“Yes, you will find a few helpful tips on how to use the enchantment effectively, with your purchase you will also be given a token, you can then redeem it for one free repair of the runic enchantment!”

“Oh...”

The girl that looked like an adventurer started looking at the sword while the lady behind the counter continued to talk. After a moment she put the sword away, it also noticed a rather large beast that was covered in gems was looking at her. The moment she raised the sword in the air the monster continued to stare.

“Thank you, I’ll have to think about it...”

The person from the beast tribe bowed her head but it didn’t seem that she would be buying this weapon.

“Oh, could I interest you in a pamphlet then? It will clue you in on the current prices!”

“Really? Then I shall take one... if it’s free that is.”

The girl chuckled while the lady behind the counter nodded and brought over some papers. On it were drawings of some weapons with prices next to them. Soon the girl adventurer removed herself from the store, the door that opened up automatically was also something that piqued her interest.

‘Wayland’s Runic Emporium? I should probably report this to the lord.’

The girl in leather armor took the glasses off that were in actuality a special high level detection tool. Thanks to it she was able to go through the strange runic store. Her name was Mary and she spent the last week investigating this new city called Albrook.

Her days were spent scouring the area for potential points of interest for her lord Arthur. She went to obvious locations like the dwarven union headquarters and the town hall. There she investigated everything mostly from the eye of the commoner.

At nights she visited taverns and even made her way into the red light district. She knew ways to make people talk via some special skills that she picked up in her life. With a combination of them and alcohol, it wasn't that hard to make the people talk about the topic that she was interested in.

When they lost their inhibitions the information that she received was mostly the truth. But everyone had their own angle, so there were some contradicting topics. One of them was the town runesmith who was somewhat an oddball.

The people from the dwarven union and the merchant faction seemed to have it out for him. From what she knew it was a long-lasting feud that not many were informed about. All of the conflicting rumors caused Mary quite a headache so she had to see if this runesmith was really the bastard that the dwarven union painted him out to be.

Her first run-in with the man was not in his store or smithy, it was actually during some strange dispute over an orphanage. The glasses that she was wearing were some high quality goods but even with them, his status page was some kind of jumbled-up mess. Besides his level that was close to 120, she couldn't really pick up anything substantial.

The problem there was that it went against one of her strength-measuring skills. It told her that the man was not that simple and he should be far over that level, not quite tier 3 but somewhat above what she would expect from a tier 2 runesmith.

She could only speculate on the cause but for now, she decided to go back to the lord's estate. The time was up and she needed to make a report to her master. As she went back the busy city became apparent to her.

While it looked fine on the outside after spending a week in disguise she could see the looming shadow over it. The report would not be a good one as the city was already being ravaged by a couple of powerful organizations from within.

From her perspective, there were a couple of options that her lord could go with. One would be to remain passive and just accept the current power structure. His position would probably be secured and the powers within wouldn't see him as much of a problem.

This was the safest route from which he could probably expect some good hush money. With time this could develop further but he wouldn't really gain much true power from this approach, besides lining his pockets with money which he could somewhat use to gain some power. But power gained only through money was quite shallow in her opinion.

All the current rich merchants would still be the ones in charge while he just received bribes to make it easier for them. This would also force him to be lenient with those greedy lot, covering for their misgivings if they ever got caught which could lower his standing in the eyes of the commoners.

The other option would be the more combative one where he took a more just approach. This meant rejecting the proposals that could gain him a lot of money but the ire of others. In favor of furthering the trust with the people, he might have to get on the bad side of the current overlords of the city.

But Mary didn't really care either way, if her master decided to take the easy route it was fine. With enough money, he might even be able to bribe enough people to set his mother free from her prison. Then all of them could just leisurely spend their lives here.

Thus she returned to the lord's mansion before she could enter through there appeared a bit of a problem.

"Halt!"

Mary was still a new face around here and she made a quick getaway the moment they arrived. No one besides the two personal guards that they took from the main house knew who she was. Due to this, the group of guards that were at the entrance saw her as nothing more than someone that was here to cause some trouble.

"As I have explained, I'm Lord Arthur's personal maid..."

It was no use, the guards weren't letting her through. The replacement maid that she procured for the lord had been already working for a week. It also didn't help that she purposely sneaked out during the night without anyone noticing.

'I guess it can't be helped...'

Without wanting to cause a scene she decided to wait for nightfall. Arthur, her lord, was probably busy with work so it would be impossible to reach him at the moment. The easiest way would be to wait and sneak back in.

Without a proper light system in the city, the mansion wasn't lit that well. The guards were left with magical lanterns or torches which they used to patrol the premises. There were quite a lot of them but for someone like her, there were enough blindspots to make her way in.

After waiting for the proper moment she made her way past the wall. Her footsteps remained silent as she ran right up the three-meter tall obstacle and quickly jumped into some nearby bushes.

Mary's form was covered head to toe in black, only her eyes were peeking out through her new set of clothes that she changed into. This special gear made maneuvering in the dark quite easy, blending into the night was somewhat of a specialty of the class that she picked up.

While true invisibility and merging her being with the shadows was not possible yet if she ever managed to reach tier 3 of this class it would be possible. There were other classes with abilities like this but for espionage and sneaking around hers was the best-suited one.

The guards that she passed by had no ability to detect her. Even if they had guard dogs that could pick up on various new scents, she had none that they could pick up on. Within a few minutes, she made her

way towards one of the windows. Her body contorted like a pretzel as she slid in through one that seemed too small for a person to fit in.

'They there are...'

As she was making her way through the ceiling she spotted one of her friends that was together with someone she didn't recognize. It was impossible for both of the knights to be the only ones remaining by Arthur's side. They were still only human and needed to sleep, it seemed that for now, they partnered up with some other guards while keeping one of them by the lord's side at all times.

Without bothering the guards she made it around the corner as she headed for her own little room. Thanks to being the lord's personal maid she received one room for herself and it came with a key. Inside she found a change of clothes along with some of her personal belongings that she left a week ago.

After taking a look into the mirror she decided to leave. She knew her young lord's wishes and that he would probably want to get a report before the day ended. Now when she was properly dressed as a maid, the guards didn't seem to mind.

'A bit sloppy...'

She thought after smiling at a guard duo that was patrolling the inside of the mansion. If she was an actual assassin who came to take the lord's life it didn't seem that there would be much of a problem.

"Who goes there!"

"It is me, Sir Gareth."

Gareth, one of the knights, was quick to react when he saw her approaching from afar. The other guards didn't seem to notice even though she was not trying to actively hide her presence.

Even the tray with snacks and tea that she was holding didn't seem to make any noise.

"Everyone stand down, it's the young lord's personal maid. Mary, the lord has been waiting for you, what took you so long?"

The other guards were quick to raise their spears but quickly looked at the woman before them. Being something like a personal maid brought some prestige with itself, so the men here closely looked at her face to engrain it. If they ever did something to the maid, it could bring the ire of the lord at them.

"Oh you know... this and that, why were you worried about little ol' me? Well, isn't that cute."

Mary gave Gareth a wink which caused the man to recoil. The other two guards that were with him were smitten by the sensual look but their leader seemed to know something more. After a moment Mary was at the door knocking, only when Arthur's voice sounded from within did she answer.

"Yes? Who is it?"

"It's me, my lord."

"Mary? Please enter."

Soon the maid made her way inside of the room. While the other two guard's imaginations were going wild, Gareth knew about this maid's true nature. To them, it looked like a nightly visit from a beautiful maid but to him, it was just more worries.

"You took your time Mary."

"I must apologize, my lord, I will accept any punishment you may deem fitting."

Mary lowered her head after entering through the door. There she saw a somewhat tired-looking young man that was surrounded by various notes and books. It was clear that he continued to work diligently through this week.

"Mary please, I'm not in the mood for your games."

Arthur looked back at the girl with the cat ears, they were bright red but not as red as her eyes were. The young man turned from his seat while rubbing his tired eyes, it was clear that he was in no mood for pleasantries.

Mary on the other hand couldn't help from giggling. She did love to see Arthur working hard as it was one of the reasons that she decided to come here with him. The young man was quite pure in his convictions and was also not scared to work to make things a reality.

"Would you like some tea? It's my special brew. It will help wake you up!"

Arthur glanced at the tray that Mary was holding. On it, he could see some biscuits and dark tea. Without a second thought, he nodded his head as getting something to wake him up would be appreciated. After taking a few sips from the somewhat bitter concoction he started feeling his mind becoming clearer.

"What did you find, don't spare the details..."

What ensued was over an hour of her report. She informed Arthur about the power structure of Albrook city that was mostly ruled by the rich merchants and craftsmen. The Dwarven union came up quite a bit, thanks to there being so many adventurers in this city, they were making most of the profit.

"Crafty dwarves, with the dungeon here they are practically monopolizing the market."

As it was clear that the driving force behind this city were the adventurers, the people that provided them with weapons would prosper. Then there were the alchemists that controlled the vast potion market. But due to the adventurer guild already providing this service in-house, they weren't profiting as much as the dwarves.

Potions could be easily transported from city to city without the need of large shops to display them. The adventures also bought them in bulk which lowered the price margin. Even with that, they were part of the prominent players in the city.

Then there was the more murky element in the city, the thieves guild. Mary was able to pay it a visit to figure out that they were the ones controlling the red-light district. Drugs and aphrodisiacs were some of the many forbidden items that they offered there.

"That does seem like a problem..."

Arthur received the whole report and now it was already quite late. One part of it all was the intelligence gathering that Mary performed but only after confirming it with the records that he went through could Arthur paste it together.

“It seems that most of the officials are receiving some ‘donations’ “

Arthur went through a large chunk of transactions and disputes that previously went through the city. In them he found that whenever a person from the merchant guild or dwarven union was involved, the decision always went their way, it was almost unanimous. Such a result was only possible if one side was getting favored.

“Yes, I’ve met some of the old residents in the city, a lot of them had lost their old homes if they were close to the merchant district.”

The merchant district was recently created, it was mostly populated by stores and taverns. It was made to house these wandering money makers and offer them a good time. The previous residents were mostly bought out or found themselves disappearing under murky circumstances.

“Though my lord, this isn’t anything surprising, isn’t this how it always goes when a new dungeon gets discovered? The rich get richer while the poor... Well, that is that one strange person though.”

“Ah yes, you have mentioned him a couple of times, Wayland was it?”

“Yes!”

Mary nodded while clapping with her hands, her tail started wiggling about which indicated to Arthur that she was somewhat excited. If his maid was acting this way, it meant that this person named Wayland was someone that he should watch out for.

“Come to think of it... I think a package arrived today... “

Arthur looked to the side, there a small pile of presents of various sizes was stashed for safekeeping. The merchants and influential people had sent him presents that he didn’t have time to go through but now after hearing the explanation from his maid, he was interested in the latest one that was delivered in a large wooden crate...

Chapter 180: What’s in the box?

“What’s that?”

“Looks like some high-quality spirit, something the dwarves probably value more than we do.”

“Just place it on that side then...”

At the city lord’s estate Arthur and his maid, Mary were going through the gifts sent to them by the various people in the city. This was a known custom of the land so it was something they expected. Most of the gifts arrived a few days ago but the one that Arthur was mostly interested in was brought in the day before.

“Precious gems, valuable elixirs, and costly alcohol, I’m not sure that I like this painting too much though, at least they tried...”

Mary was organizing the gifts by their worth. Some of them were slightly in bad taste, like a large painting of Arthur's father. The person that decided on it probably didn't think that the father-son relationship wasn't as bad.

Then there were some costly items, the merchants and dwarves did show off their wealth. While the bottle of alcohol might have seemed like a bad gift, it would probably fetch the largest price at the auction house. It was quite the rare delicious concoction that a lot of people would pay many gold coins for.

"I'm not sure what that person from the adventurer's guild is thinking though."

Mary looked down to Arthur's hands in which he was holding a letter. This was the only thing they received from the adventurers guild. While the gifts here weren't all that special, they were still adequate.

"They know their position, not like I can run the biggest business out of the city."

Arthur just shrugged as the adventurers guild was somewhat at a different scale than the others. While he could use his name to bully the others, he would not be able to do the same with the adventurers guild. Their monopoly on everything dungeon-related was widespread throughout the entire kingdom.

Even the high nobles had to keep an eye out for the guild masters. But this didn't mean that they had to bow down to the common adventurer, those were still nothing more than convenient workers to them.

"They could have at least sent a gift basket instead!"

Mary pouted while grabbing the last box, it was somewhat heavy but not for someone that was a tier 2 class holder. It was a regular wooden box that was nailed shut from the top. This was not a problem for Mary, she just slipped her slender fingers into the small gap at the top and quickly pried it open while the nails remained stuck to the wood.

"Oh my, this looks... interesting."

The maid reached into the box while Arthur looked from the side. The interesting look that his retainer was showing didn't come out often so he was somewhat intrigued. Soon the content was revealed to be some strange metallic contraption with six legs that looked like a spider.

"Is that a golem?"

"It does look like one my lord but I haven't seen this type before..."

While golems were considered rare they could be spotted here and there. Most people when they heard the name, an image of a monster popped into their heads. They were usually large hulks in dungeons that were of a more humanoid shape. They had a reputation for being a tough cookie to crack, even more, if their golem core was not exposed.

"It's not working?"

Mary placed the strange-looking contraption that was supposed to be a golem down on the ground but it didn't move. Neither she or Arthur knew anything about runic golems, at most they saw some at the auction houses or ones in the banks used for protection.

“Wait, there is something in the box my lord!”

The maid reached into the box that was filled out with straw and pulled out a small booklet. This reminded her of the time she was at the Runic Emporium, there too were instruction manuals for some of the wares being sold. Just as she had suspected the instruction pointed to something.

“Look at this lord Arthur, we are supposed to use something called the ‘Remote control’”

“Oh, interesting...”

Arthur was handed the instruction manual while Mary went digging for this remote control object. She stuck her head right in and after some searching, she found a smaller paper box inside this large wooden one. This wasn't all as inside this paper box besides the remote she found a small cylinder with some glowing liquid.

“I don't understand, what are we supposed to do with this lord Arthur?”

She asked while looking at the young man but instead of getting a reply, there was silence. When turning she noticed that her lord was busy reading the instruction manual with quite the sparkle in his eyes. This was not something that she expected to see, the young lord that she knew rarely showed this expression, only when around his mother did he ever drop his guard like this.

“I see now, this shouldn't be difficult, could you hand me that box, Mary.”

Arthur quickly got to work on the contraption after going through the instruction manual. While he worked Mary was handed the small booklet. There were detailed drawings of everything that was included in this box along with the golem, the first thing that Arthur needed to do was place the container with the glowing liquid into the golem.

It was a bit strange for the noble Lord to be the one assembling this golem but he did look happy. There was a small screwdriver that he had to use, it opened up a small latch on the side into which he could stick the canister in. From the manual, he knew that in this canister there was mana fluid to power the golem. The design was quite simple and it would be just as simple to refill it with a new one.

This was the power source without which the golem could not function. After connecting this part and closing the latch most of the work was done. What was left now was to use the remote control. Arthur injected a little bit of mana into it and the moment he did he could see some small runes starting to glow.

There was a large red button at the right-most corner of this rectangular-looking item. When he pressed it, the golem was activated. The small eye that was at the front started glowing and the legs followed soon after. Mary moved to her lord's side, as this was still a golem, it could very well be some kind of trap.

“Lord Arthur, be careful, we don't know what this golem is, it could...”

“What? Do you think someone would be stupid enough to assassinate the new lord of Albrook?”

Arthur laughed as he didn't think that he had enough worth for anyone to go after his head. No one would gain anything but the ire of the Valerian household by causing him harm. He knew that his family would be forced to send in some powerful knights to look into this matter if he ever died. For the

perpetrator, this would be a nightmare as they would chase them down for daring to soil their perfect family name.

While he was chuckling his battle maid retainer saw things differently as she placed herself between her master and the spider droid. When activated the legs pushed the body off the ground and quickly turned toward Arthur.

“Calm down Mary, the instruction said that when activated the golem would ‘interface’ with whoever was holding this remote control, it would then imprint onto their mana signature.”

Mary was somewhat confused by the explanation but Arthur was knowledgeable enough to know what this meant. This remote was something similar to a control rod, but instead of having to constantly hold it, he only needed to go through the procedure once. After that, the golem was supposed to react to some voiced commands.

This was made apparent after the golem quickly went into standby mode. Its eye that was glowing green turned blue and it curled up its legs. Now it looked like some kind of sleeping spider that was ready to pounce on someone.

“The instruction said that there were some existing ‘runic programs’ but I’m not sure what that means...”

Before Arthur could press another button from the remote Mary interrupted him instead.

“Lord Arthur, wouldn’t it be better if we did this outside... I don’t think we need to be this close to the golem...”

Arthur gave out a sigh but nodded, his lady retainer was still afraid that this magical contraption could explode or something. Even if it wasn’t made to hurt the new owner, it didn’t mean that it was safe to be around it.

Mana fluid was quite known to be volatile as it was concentrated mana in liquid form. If handled without care it could be overloaded to cause a large explosion. Thus both of them and the guards that were standing watch outside relocated to the courtyard. There the servants witnessed the strange spider droid performing some tricks.

The remote control didn’t really have that many buttons but when Arthur clicked one, the droid started dancing around. Then another one made it perform a backflip which was quite surprising for a golem. These magical creations were not known for their agility, already seeing one this small was quite surprising.

This continued for about an hour until Arthur finally realized that he wasted so much time on playing. The golem didn’t have any armaments but it did have some visually stunning spells and one that produced a gentle tune. It was clear to him that this was just a presentation given to him by this runesmith. It was as if he was telling him that this was only a simple sample of what he could make a golem do.

Arthur and Mary returned to the lord’s office for another quick discussion. After going through the gifts there was a clear winner and his name was Wayland.

“This Runesmith should be more famous if he can create such marvels of magical engineering but...”

The spider droid was to the side and not turned off. Arthur on the other hand grabbed the log of the items sold at the Valerian family auction house. Just as he had expected there were no listings with Wayland’s name as the seller.

“This Wayland could be a potential asset...”

“You think so too my lord?”

“Yes, he must clearly have a grudge against the merchants and the dwarven union but why did he decide to stay here, I don’t really understand. There must be many better cities for a craftsman of his caliber, he should be able to easily find one where they would accept a human runesmith.”

To Arthur it was a mystery, the man just showed up out of nowhere and decided to go against a huge behemoth like the dwarven union. It didn’t seem that he was purely motivated by monetary gains. Mary also informed him about the orphanage situation, which painted Wayland in a more favorable light.

“Mary.”

“Yes, Lord Arthur?”

“Could you fetch Ferdinand for me?”

“Of course my lord!”

“Oh and prepare the carriage, I’ll be making a trip to the auction house.”

Arthur made a decision, after going through all of the paperwork that he had in this mansion he was ready to make his first move. It didn’t look like he would be getting much out of the old merchants. They had rooted themselves in the city and their web of contacts was wide.

But there was one dark horse in this city that had potential. This was of course the city’s runesmith, Wayland. From everyone here, the man had the most potential and his morals also seemed to be in line with Arthur’s. Thus he made a decision to reach out to him with an olive branch.

....

Back at the workshop Wayland along with his two helpers was working tirelessly. They didn’t sleep for a few days again and Bernir along with Dyana were showing clear signs of exhaustion.

“Wayland sugar, I know that this is important but I think we need to take a break...”

Dyana called out while being covered in sweat, a rather sloppy-looking Bernir was down on the ground. Roland looked back to his two exhausted assistants while also panting slightly.

Since the reveal that the orphanage had been timed to be sold he had tossed himself into a working frenzy. The spider droid that he was supposed to fix in a week he knocked out in two days, he even drew up a custom instruction manual along with a special remote to go with it.

He wasn’t sure what he was hoping for as his expectations towards the new young lord were quite low. Even if he piqued his interest with his golem, he wasn’t really sure what that would give him. Would the

person force the inspector to change their mind for him? He couldn't see the noble brat just help him for nothing and signing an unfavorable contract to save Elodia's orphanage was the last thing he wanted to do.

"Ah yes sure, take the rest of the day off... we are already ahead of schedule, we'll be able to assemble the new smelter with this amount..."

Roland dropped the hammer to the ground while Dyana looked at him with a troubled expression. Like before Bernir was hoisted over her shoulder and carried out of the heated-up workshop. While his fire resistance skill had leveled up it was nowhere close to reaching the other two.

The inability for him to do anything about the orphanage situation was slowly eating away at him. Unbeknownst to Elodia he had Lobelia clue him in on everything through the help of the thieves guild contacts.

Apparently, the merchant they were dealing with had been involved with Albrook even before the dungeon appeared. The house that they had received had almost no worth before the adventurer guild appeared in the city and this was the main reason Elodia managed to get it.

At the start of Albrooks' rise, everything was still dirt cheap. Thanks to this, some of the first residents were able to get in good deals. This did probably leave a bad taste in some of the seller's mouths.

The contract that was signed was one of the more basic ones. The clause about the safety issues concerning children was not really taken seriously by many people and was mostly forgotten with time. It was still in there and now offered this man a way back to getting his old house. If he was successful in his scheme, the money from which he could sell it would be more than ten times what Elodia bought it for.

But from Roland's standpoint, this was probably not the reason for going to this length. Instead, he was playing the long game. Other merchants were seen buying up other buildings or renting them. The explosion of new adventurers was still on the rise and would certainly go on for another few years.

This dungeon was a very newbie-friendly one. Thanks to this an adventurer could spend many years here grinding on their levels before ever needing to move towards a higher-ranked dungeon, that is if they even made it that far.

'Bastard probably wants to split it up into rooms and make some kind of dorm for the adventurers.'

Roland started walking out of the workshop to clear his head while grumbling. A good way of making money in this city was through small bedrooms for the adventurers to live in. As long as they had a bed they were fine and with a constant stream of monster parts they could afford a higher price point.

Lobelia also brought him some troubling information, at first, he thought about forking up the money for the entire orphanage building. Regretfully it didn't seem that the merchant was willing to sell it even if the price was many times over its real value.

He would also like to evade any unlawful ways of clearing up this problem as the inspector was one of the more influential officials of the city. It didn't seem like threatening him would do them any good or would be easy to pull off.

But it seemed that it was one of the few options that he had. It might be possible to pay the thief guild a steep sum to take care of this problem. Then the other option would be to set up a temporary shelter for the kids close to his home. The cheapest option would be to use tents that usually adventurers camped out in the wilderness.

The thought of so many brats running around his workshop was already giving him a headache. Leaving them out on the streets didn't seem right though. He had not yet discussed this option with Elodia as he knew that she would probably not ask him for help.

He was planning on telling her his tent plan soon though. Elodia did seem in a big rut ever since this predicament started. Probably having someone that she could rely on, would ease her nerves. Before he could reveal his lackluster plan though he got an unknown visitor.

As he was taking a stroll through his yard he decided to go outside and check up on Elodia. There right as he was opening the gate he met up with a certain person. The moment he saw him he almost laid an egg as he recognized him from various events and speeches that he made in the city, it was the old city mayor.