

Runesmith 203

Chapter 203: Call to adventure.

'Haven't been here in a while...'

Roland was wearing the more compact version of his armor without the helmet part. Even then he kept his face somewhat covered with the robe that he draped over his body. After so many years of hiding from pesky family members, it was hard to change his ways. It didn't feel right if he was not covered head to toe with armor or back at his home.

Before he was the adventurer's guild that needed to give him the gold ranker test. For it he would need to leave the city and rendezvous with someone from an affiliated guild. That someone would be the judge that after the task was over decided if he was worthy of the gold rank.

Now, this was somewhat a troublesome part of the whole deal. While from the outside it might have looked professional for another higher rank adventurer to tag along to keep a newbie in line, sometimes it went astray. Some of the chaperones were less than stellar in their morals, sometimes the newbie ended up forking up some of their gold just so they could pass the test.

Would he have luck with his test checkers or would he have to bribe them? Roland was someone with a lot of money but that was also known by the guild. If the person grading him was to fail him for not paying up he would be sidelined for half a year. The half-year was not the problem though but losing valuable time on repeating the rank-up tests was.

Elodia did say that she would try to talk Solana into giving him a lighter test. Also, there was the issue with his status screen becoming open to prying eyes which could be avoided with her help. This was not something the union could get involved in either so he should have been feeling more at ease. Yet for one reason or another, he was not looking forward to leaving this city. His home and everything he owned were here.

'There is always something that doesn't go according to plan...'

The incident with the ant mine came to his mind. Thus he would like to avoid any tasks that involved entering areas that hadn't been explored. Ones that involved mysterious disappearances were also similar. Most of the time the reason was some kind of powerful monster that had evolved and left its habitat. Without knowing what he was getting himself into it would be hard to prepare the countermeasures.

'But I guess that's the adventure part in the name of this profession.'

After letting out a sigh he descended into the tavern-like adventurer's guild. On the inside, he was hit by the smell of alcohol and sweat. After the city population had started to settle, so did the adventurer guild become more structured. They had increased the count of their receptionists after a certain overachiever had left them dry to make up for the loss of manpower.

Roland scanned the room with his eyes and homed in on the elven lady that knew him. Elodia apparently had taken some time out of her day to speak about the issue. With her help, he hoped to receive a mission that wouldn't involve scouting out cemeteries and running into abominations. Without a proper priest, such a task would be difficult even for him.

“Well, if it isn’t our famous runesmith! Haven’t seen you in a while.”

After waiting for fifteen minutes he was finally able to arrive at Solana’s desk. He had arrived in this city some years ago and this elven maiden had already been living here. Even though it had been a while, she didn’t look like she aged a day.

Just like in the books of fiction in his old world, elves tended to live for longer than humans. This didn’t reach the level of thousands of years but at a base, they could live three times as much as a human. This was without accounting for magical ways of prolonging life that could be used by any species.

Even Roland would probably live longer than a regular human thanks to his higher level and vitality stat that kept increasing. If he wanted to boost his longevity even further he could buy various elixirs that had diminishing returns. But for now, he needed to focus on the present, if he made it to thirty was still up to debate as in this world of uncertainty every day could be his last.

“Good day, Solana. I think Elodia has spoken to you about the thing...”

“Straight to the point, you’re no fun what does that girl see in you, well besides that handsome face that is.”

Solana chuckled while winking towards Roland. In the past perhaps a sensual look from a beauty like this would make him get nervous but at this point in his life, he didn’t really care. His face was devoid of any reaction which caused the elven lady to pout slightly.

“Fine, you are lucky that I owe Elodia a favor, I have prepared the paperwork you just need to sign it.”

While the woman seemed slightly dejected by his emotionless face, he just wanted to get on with it. What he received were three pieces of paper that were very similar. There was a difference though, each one had a different task written down on it.

“This is the form for the gold rank test but why are there three?”

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“The girl is looking out for you, she even helped me pick up some commissions from the board.”

“She did?”

“Yes, she narrowed it down to three that shouldn’t take too long, now choose one and that’ll be it. You should appreciate my effort in all of this and give me a present for all that hard work.!”

“...Did all that hard work involved copying Elodia’s handwriting too?”

“Haha, did you notice~”

Roland rolled his eyes as he quickly noticed that this perfectly filled-out paperwork was done by Elodia. Probably she failed to convince this lazy sun elf to just help her out. He could imagine her going through the chaotic notice board, listing down the best commissions, and handing everything over to Solana that just needed to sign off on it.

‘Did she do it after or before working in the shop?’

He could not pinpoint the exact time when she could have done it. While he did not ask her to go to this extent, there was a warm fuzzy feeling in his heart that she cared this much to get this done. After coming back from this small expedition he was already thinking about perhaps buying her a new dress.

'Let's see...'

Dungeon exploration city of Flord

...A new dungeon has appeared in the southernmost region of the island. We are looking for adventurers from the silver grade and up to lead an expedition into the dungeon...

Escort the merchant caravan to the city of Reeka.

...A medium-sized merchant caravan consisting of ten carriages will be leaving towards the island's western region...

Explore the dig site in the easternmost region.

...A party of adventurers along with the mining team has gone missing and if possible bring them back alive...

He read through the snippets explaining all of the tasks and he didn't really like any of them. First was the dungeon exploration which brought him down south. The city of Albrook was in the northern region which would make traveling there hard. Then there was the issue of dungeon exploration that he was worried about.

It was another new dungeon similar to the one here. The extent of the monster's strength was unknown, also the type of the dungeon wasn't mentioned either. It could be a giant maze filled with traps or a lush rainforest with a large open area. Yet it was a somewhat basic request, just go to the dungeon, fight some monsters and come back.

Then there was the dig site exploration that reminded him about his younger days. This was a no-brainer as he would not go towards an ominous area like that. Already an adventurer party was probably dead and they wanted to throw more bodies at the issue.

The speediest one would be the bodyguard routine. Instead of going to deadly areas they just needed to protect some merchants. While their points were filled with monsters that they needed to pass, there should be enough of them to get through it. There would be no surprises as it was an already mapped out area and a trade route used by others.

While the decision to take depended on him, he would not be able to pick the person that would be shadowing behind him. All of these started out at other locations to which he would need to travel out of his own pocket.

Realistically he had only two choices. Either he agrees to get locked away down in another new dungeon with god knows what type of enemies, or he becomes a bodyguard for some rich people. While both had their share of danger at least the escort mission gave him the option to escape easier. Leaving a new dungeon when assaulted was a lot harder than escaping from a bandit attack with more people around.

"Hey?"

“Huh?”

“Have you made a decision, we don’t have all day, those commissions also have to be fulfilled soon, the caravan one, in particular, is in two days. They arrived a few days ago and will be leaving soon. If you decide to take it your guard will meet you at the next stop, from there you will be graded on your performance. If you want to hear my opinion, you should probably go with that one. Those merchants have deep pockets and no trouble hiring gold adventurers~”

Solana was right, this was probably the easiest one from them all. While he would need to sleep outside and be on guard duty, with his current set of skills traveling wouldn’t be hard. Thanks to them hiring gold rank adventurers to be on the safe side, it made the test easier as there probably wouldn’t be that many monsters to defeat.

Yet, from time to time some bandits did try their blades, there was a lot of money involved and people were greedy. Now if he denied all of the propositions he might have to take the penalty. Solana would get in a lot of trouble with the guild if she didn’t file the correct paperwork.

From what he knew, the notice of someone taking the gold rank test had already gone through. So that they wouldn’t get people constantly refusing certain missions they prepared a little system.

First, the person went to the guild to announce that they would try to register for the test. One of the clerks in a higher position would then sign off on the name of the adventurer taking the test. Sometimes this person would even force certain tasks if they wanted but like with his case this was left up to the receptionist.

Now his name was already written down in the books. If he didn’t take the test and attempted his luck a few weeks later, the clerk would have his name noted. With the date being there he would be denied another try and need to wait till the half-year penalty was over. The only way to go around it would be to ask the guild master or the person responsible for it.

‘Maybe Elodia or Solana could convince that person to erase me from the books but I shouldn’t ask for more than this...’

There was also something that he noticed, his class was listed on this piece of paper. Just as they agreed on the lord part of this Runesmith class had been erased from the paperwork. It seemed that with enough backing a person could evade a lot of busywork if this came to bite him in the behind was still up to debate but even if his real class was revealed he was slowly coming to terms with that not being a serious issue anymore.

After contemplating it for a few minutes he agreed on the caravan escort mission. While this made him think back to the time when he met up with the moon elves his luck had increased since then. Perhaps a bandit attack was possible but he was somewhat confident in his own fighting capabilities.

With his spell-firing arsenal, a lot of fights could be won but if things got too tough, he could always just make a run for it. He would be abandoning the quest but it would be better to take the penalty for it as adventuring wasn’t his main profession in the first place. It was just something that needed to be taken care of sooner or later.

“Think we are out of time, come back tomorrow after you make your decision!”

Roland glanced behind him as he noticed that a line started to form behind him. Just like Solana said he was being indecisive too much. After nodding he stepped to the side and let the grumpy-looking adventurer behind him tend to his business.

'I only have two days left.'

While normally this would not be enough time for someone like him to make a decision, he had prepared beforehand. Elodia had explained to him that some missions could have a fast expiration date so before she went ahead with talking to Solana he took care of everything concerning his leave.

His spider drones would patrol the inside yard while the improved magical turrets focused their magical points on any potential invaders. Bernir and Elodia had the master key that was attuned to their mana signature. Even if someone tried holding it, the turrets would fire at them.

There was also no way of anyone knowing about their existence as they were created from regular accessories. When he returned home it was time for a strategic meeting with both his assistant.

"Bernir, I'll leave everything up to you are you sure you can handle it?"

"Boss, you should stop worrying so much, who in their right mind would rob the runesmith that is working for the city lord? And did you forget about our little deal with the thieves guild?"

"Yes I know, that's the only reason why I'm willing to leave but you never know if some idiot will use this chance to rob the runesmith's house while he is gone."

"Well, that's true."

What Roland feared was not the locals but the random riff-raff that could gain some courage after drinking too much. There was already one incident when he visited the dungeon but luckily Bernir was able to take care of it. News of him leaving would spread sooner or later which could bring harm to the people staying here.

"But you can leave things to me, I'm just itching to use those rune-rifles on something that can move..."

Bernir cackled oddly while looking at the runic rifle that could produce various magical effects. It was something that would allow bridging the gap between combat and non-combat classes. With the battery pack that could be quickly replaced it was a weapon that was well suited for defensive battles.

With all the defenses set up, he was somewhat at ease. Agni would be staying and the spider drones would patrol the area. His job was to protect a caravan which entailed constantly moving around, this would mean that he could not take the mule golem with him.

This didn't mean that he wouldn't be taking at least one spider drone with himself. There were porters that could carry his luggage. While he didn't trust them that much, they should not run away with his goods. The golems were mostly akin to portable spell turrets which could come in handy during a battle in the open. Without places to hide any bandits would find it hard to go against homing magic arrows coming their way.

'I should start packing and give my reply tomorrow...'

After clearing things up with Bernir and Elodia that would be staying, he needed to check his armor. Everything needed to fit into his backpack-sized spatial bag as he could not yet implement the spatial runes that he was working the kinks out. It was time to finally stretch his legs again and give adventuring another try. If luck was on his side, this would turn into a quick journey with some camping but if not...

Chapter 204: New party members.

“Are you sure you didn’t forget anything?”

“Yeah, everything I need is in here.”

Roland was standing outside his home while looking at Elodia that seemed a bit worried. It was strange to leave on a small adventure and actually have a place to come back to this time around. Usually, even if something went astray he could just change locations while leaving the troublesome area.

Now on the other hand if he for some reason abandoned his mission there would be some consequences. Adventurers that fled in the face of danger would get reprimanded, sometimes they could even get kicked out. Trusting in the guild was something that was built up through the ages, they could not risk keeping members that would give up their mission without good reason.

“Agni, take care of Elodia while I’m away and also keep Bernir out of trouble. If you see him drinking too much, you know what to do.”

“Awooo!”

“Hey, What’s that supposed to mean Boss?”

Bernir was to the side trying to play it off but both of them knew that he had a drinking problem. When Roland was in the workshop he had a strict non-drinking policy during work hours. Now when he would be gone for a week or two, it gave Bernir ample time to booze it up.

“Be sure not to offend any rich merchants or nobles.”

As Roland was slinging his spatial backpack over his shoulder that made him feel like he was going on a school trip, he was given one last piece of advice.

“I’ll try.”

Everyone knew that Roland had a certain way of presenting himself. Even to this day he had trouble bowing his head towards authority which was mostly caused by his upbringing. It felt strange to be afraid of people with nothing but status. If they were powerful tier 3 class holders then it was another thing. After a small hug that caused Elodia some pain due to him wearing his shiny armor, he made his way towards the city.

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“Everyone gather up, I will discuss your duties, my name is Nicholas and I’ll be responsible for you lot.”

‘So this is the group?’

Roland was looking at a man of medium-built in mismatching-looking armor. On the back, he was wearing a long spear that was probably the most expensive item from his entire set. This was something

that he started to notice with the adventurers in this world. They all tended to spend most of their money on their weapons.

This was reflected in his own shop which saw better sales with items that could cause more damage than ones that protected its user. Only when the adventurers had some spare change did they start to invest in protective measures like stronger armor.

He on the other hand had made his armor his strongest weapon, with somewhat lacking battle skills he needed to focus on what he was good at, his runic items. The magic they were able to produce could mimic high-level skills and the cost was only mana which he had a large reserve of. This person here had the highest level of the entire group which prompted Roland to inspect his status screen.

Name:

Nicholaus L 132

Classes:

T2 Spirit Spearman L32

T2 Spearman L50

T1 Warrior L25

T1 Spear Warrior L25

‘Spirit Spearman? Well, that’s an uncommon class.’

Roland had amassed a small compendium of class knowledge by this time. Spirit in this case didn’t have anything to do with ghosts, it was just another form of energy. There was a stronger variation of it called aura but he had yet to see someone have it.

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This spirit would just be added to the person’s status screen and used as a separate resource. Sometimes the skills would combine stamina and mana to be performed which made these sorts of classes hard to level up. Unless a person excelled at all three it was hard to get any skills that were worthwhile but the added resource did give them more options.

“There are only five wagons now but as we travel further new ones will be added, for now, I will decide on your...”

The man continued to talk while Roland just glanced to the side as he was not that interested. Normally the strongest adventurer received the leadership position but this wasn’t set in stone. The guild could just propose who would lead it but the people here were not part of an army, they didn’t need to listen to anyone of the same ranks as them.

During the mining expedition where he encountered mines, there was one strong adventurer party that no one dared to go against. Yet here, on the other hand, there was not that much of a difference in prestige. The man with the spear might have had the highest level but this didn’t mean that others would listen to him as he was not the only gold rank adventurer here.

“Hey ugly could you shut up? Stop acting like you own the place.”

There it was, a somewhat deeper voice but it belonged to a woman. The people turned to the person that it belonged to. It was a tall woman that wasn't wearing that much armor, her belly was exposed which revealed quite the set of brown chiseled abs. Over her shoulder, she had a large axe that looked like it weighed a ton.

Name:

Grisalde L 123

Classes:

T2 Barbarian L23

T2 Gladiator L50

T1 Axe Warrior L25

T1 Brute L25

Her classes were also more unique than he was used to seeing. Probably if the woman didn't have some medium-sized lumps protruding from her chest it would be hard for him to figure out her gender. Her body looked like it belonged to a bodybuilder that had smeared glistening oil all over it.

“Oh, this is getting interesting.”

“Are they going to fight?”

The other adventurers that were silver just stood back and watched while commenting. No one would be willing to get between the two if a fight broke out. His luck pulled a fast one on as after everyone had cleared to the sides it left him between the two fighters. With how high his own level was he also didn't feel like moving but this was of course noticed by these two that started to quickly eyeball him.

Roland was just minding his own business while leaning up against one of the merchant carts. This whole experience made him think about some old school days. It was as if some kid was trying to shit test him. If he just lowered his head and went away he could be seen as an easy target. On the other hand, if he just stayed here a potential fight could break out.

These two were melee fighters that worked best at closer range. This wasn't the same for him, as even though he could activate his spells fast he was at a disadvantage when someone closed the gap. The lady in particular just needed a little sprint to get into striking range. Even with his armor on he wasn't sure if it would be a good idea to try to wrestle her down or get into a fistfight either.

“Is that metal head with you?”

“No, I thought he was with you!”

“This is why adventurers are...”

Roland quietly said under his breath while the muscular lady gave him the stink eye.

“What are you mumbling about? If you have something to say then speak up!”

She started shouting which caused the spearman to grab his weapon. Even before they met any monsters and bandits the whole place seemed to be ready to explode. Before they noticed that he could use magic he could probably send a few spells their way but this was not something that he wanted to do. They were already on the clock and if he caused a ruckus his gold rank test was in jeopardy.

“What are you doing, stop this at once! You aren’t paid to fight with each other.”

Luckily one of the merchants finally noticed after the barbarian woman started shouting around. After going for the one thing that adventurers loved the most, which was money they quickly quieted down. Then instead of the man with the spear the real boss of the whole caravan finally showed up, the merchant paying for it all.

The man looked to be above forty and of a stockier build. He was a regular human but his height was not much more of a dwarf’s. He was wearing a cap that from what Roland knew was fashionable for rich people to wear. His clothes were also quite extravagant, made from some quality fabrics and the color of dark purple.

‘It will be easy for bandits to pick this guy out of the crowd if some ever attack.’

It was clear that this man had no trouble spending money on himself. There were several shiny rings on his thick fingers along with some kind of costly-looking pendant around his neck. Behind him, there were two armored men with pikes that looked like regular soldiers from the city.

It was normal for a merchant to have their personal guards like these. Hiring adventurers was just a quick way to bolster their forces during travel times. These personal bodyguards were not used to fighting monsters but other humans instead and it was also cheaper to go to the guild for a temp worker. They didn’t need to worry about the adventurer’s food or clothes, they were just contractors.

“If you can’t decide amongst yourselves, then I’ll do it for you. This is Ingran, he is the head of my guards, he will divide you into smaller teams of two or three for each cart that you will be responsible for.”

The merchant pointed to a large man that was wearing some shiny armor. His face was full of scars and he looked like a retired knight. Most likely he was an old adventurer that was smart enough to seek a more steady job at the side of a merchant. This line of work was less deadly than constantly fighting orcs or giant slug monsters.

“Gather up you lot, we don’t have all day if you don’t have anything to do, help the porters pack the carts, the sooner we leave the sooner you will receive your wage.”

Luckily the adventurers didn’t complain anymore. He heard the large woman snorting before walking away, she also shoulder-checked one of the silver-ranked adventurers that weren’t fast enough to get out of her way. The man with the spear seemed a bit more reasonable as he remained in place to get his orders.

‘They’ll probably reconcile after the first battle.’

Roland decided to stand up while going towards the merchant guard leader. While there was some drama, most of the time when lives were on the line the adventurers were quick to gather together. It

was not uncommon for big enemies to turn into drinking buddies after going through a few battles together. "You there, state your name, rank, and level."

"Wayland, Silver rank, level... over a hundred..."

"Over a hundred? Have you achieved your second tier 2 class change?"

Roland nodded at the question from the guard leader, the other silver-ranked adventurers started staring at him as they didn't expect him to outlevel them while being the same rank.

"Wayland, there it is... going through your gold rank test..."

Ingran came prepared as one of the guards handed him a list of the adventurers that they hired. While he was not a gold rank adventurer by name, Roland could be considered one on paper by the potential strength that he brought. Probably due to this the head guard here would treat him with more respect but also give him tasks more suited of a gold rank adventurer.

"Runesmith and Rune Mage...? Very well, you'll be in the front cart then, please get your possessions and move accordingly. I'll be relying on your magical capabilities then."

After going through the adventurer list the man quickly changed his tone. It was clear that something about his magical slinging capabilities was there. Mainly that he was a Rune Mage which was of course a lie thought up to hide his other crafting class. With the cover of Rune Mage, his rune using ways could be easily justified. He would be in the furthestmost cart so the one that would be the first target of bandits.

Yet he could not argue about his spot and just continued to nod. With his backpack slung over one shoulder he went towards the carts in question. The one that he would be occupying was quite large and made from some thick wood. Two somewhat large horses were being strapped to this large wagon. They were much bigger than their earthly counterparts and their fur was really red. It made them look like some kind of demonic beast that would burst with flames at any moment.

"The head guard told me to come here."

"I see, there should be some room inside but please don't touch anything behind the door."

This wagon was quite long and to the sides, he could see windows that had latches on them. There was a small area on the backside that was sectioned off from the main inside. There was enough room for him to sit on one side on what looked to be some kind of bench. In the middle, there was a narrow wooden door through which a person could fit in.

At this moment, one of the guards was going through this door which allowed him to peek inside. There he saw various weapons, food, and something that looked like narrow bunk beds. It seemed that this wagon housed a large portion of the merchant's guards and was probably also the reason why it was larger than the other ones used to transport goods.

There needed to be enough free space for the guards to move around and get their weapons ready. The latches on the sides were probably used for the crossbows that he caught a glimpse of. If they were attacked by something this wagon could act as a barrier point through which they could actually use ranged weapons or magical attacks.

There was another identical cart like this that when they started to move into position was placed right in the back. He could see the gold-ranked spear user be sent to that one which put him a bit at ease as he wouldn't need to keep him company. But instead, he was given the other troublemaker as a wagon partner, the large barbarian woman that almost caused a scene.

"So they shoved me in with the dome head?"

The moment the large woman stepped foot into the small compartment the whole wagon shook around. When seeing her up this close he was reminded of some of the half-orcs or goliath races. Yet she looked like a regular human being but he would probably believe it more if she came out to have some roots with one of those races.

"Unfortunately it does seem that way."

"Oh, so you can actually talk?"

Grisalde sat down opposite to him which didn't leave much space to maneuver between them. Roland was not a small man and he was wearing full body armor that made him seem even wider. The barbarian on the other hand was still half a head larger than he was, when the guards were packing up they seemed quite perturbed by the two large adventurers sitting there.

"Yes but I like to keep my articulating to a minimum if that's okay with you?"

"Articulating? You're a funny one."

She started chuckling under her breath while smiling. While the barbarian seemed somewhat dangerous it wasn't something that he wasn't used to. It was time to leave, in the next city the assigned chaperone from the guild would join him on the mission. While it could be a gold rank adventurer this was not always the case.

'Haven't left this city in years...'

The wagon finally jolted forward as it moved along with him and the barbarian woman that continued to throw insults at him. Already he was regretting taking this test that would just offer him some minor quality of life improvements over his last rank. Yet it was something that he needed to take care of as if he ever got himself into tier 3 the platinum adventurer rank brought a few major improvements.