

Runesmith 205

Chapter 205: Trouble already?

“Everyone listen up, we will be arriving at the rendezvous spot with the rest of the caravan, you have one day to rest before we set off, you won’t be paid if you don’t show up in the morning.”

The guard leader shouted out while standing really close to Roland. This caused a somewhat sleepy barbarian to wake up. Both her and Roland were still stuck on the large cart that carried a portion of the merchant’s guards.

Grisalde was her name, at the start of the journey she was quite loud. But after a few hours of the bumpy journey, she had fallen asleep. While Roland had a skill that kept him from falling asleep he was convinced that the woman had a secret skill of the reverse effect. He could not imagine being able to sleep this much while being stuck in such a confined place.

“Huh, what? Are monsters attacking?”

The guard leader returned to the inside of the wagon he was riding while Grisalde had woken up. Clearly, this woman would be susceptible to sneak attacks luckily there were enough scouts and archers to signal if someone was attacking. Roland as well could use his mapping feature to scan the area for potential enemies.

‘So this is where the rest of the adventurers are supposed to join us?’

“Halt, let me see your papers! ... I see, it’s Mr. Reymund’s caravan.”

Roland saw the guard change his tune fast after the merchant’s name was mentioned. He could also see that a few coins made it into the hand of the gate guard. This was quite a typical scene as searching through the wagons was something the city guards were supposed to perform.

Each city could have slightly different rules for any contraband. Normally the merchants would have to go through a long process of frisking, then if something that was forbidden was found they would be given a fine. Thus even if they were clean it was better to bribe the guards that could make life hard for them.

Roland had heard stories of the soldiers planting contraband during the searches. In this one, they found an occult relic that caused the merchant in question to get a death sentence. The item used was then found out to have been placed by a competitor that bribed the guards.

This world was really cutthroat when it came to money, his little squabble with the union didn’t sound so bad. At least they didn’t use underhanded tactics like that, otherwise, he would have probably had to leave the city he was in a long time ago.

“Damn, why is my ass so numb, I need a drink!”

After they were inside the city the barbarian woman he shared the wagon quickly made her way towards the first tavern that she saw. In the contract, they had signed the adventurers were free to wander the cities as they were there to fight the monsters. But they would not get any coin unless they arrived at the last destination and had the merchant sign it.

This agreement favored the job giver quite a bit. If the merchant decided that the adventurer didn't do their job properly they could withhold the money. Then a long process of back and forth with the guild workers would start to see if the claim was valid. Luckily the guild could blacklist a merchant like that if they abused their right to withhold money.

Yet if the merchant was still unwilling to fork up the silver coins, they could not be forced. The blacklisting wasn't the end of the world but the adventurer in question would not get paid. Sometimes the guild covered some of the expenses but that also depended on the adventurer's rank. This was also one of the perks of having a better rank as the guild tended to side with their high rankers over the merchants.

"Remember, we are leaving early in the morning!"

While everyone dispersed into the city fast Roland was left wondering where he should head out to. Most of the silver ranked adventurers came in smaller groups but he was going solo. The city he was in was mostly a hub of commerce, the merchants just unloaded their wares into the auction house or the merchant union warehouse. There it would be sorted and distributed to various stores.

'Should I visit the auction house or get some food instead?'

This was somewhat troubling as for the first time in a while he found himself with nothing to do. Back at home, there was always some work to be done either crafting or doing a quick dungeon run.

'That person will be arriving in the morning so I don't need to look for them, this city lacks an adventurer guild... I should go to an inn first before all the rooms are taken.'

After thinking for a while he decided to search for a place to stay first. With this being such a busy city it might be hard to find some lodging. He did not want to spend his night in a barn with some other broke adventurers. The days of him not being able to afford comfortable living were long gone, this time around he would live his life a bit more.

Thus with a slow step, he went towards the city area while also being sure to note down where the meeting spot would be. With time he also hoped to implement a waypoint system into his helmet along with it being able to map out areas he had been through. He needed to do something about the size of the map as it quickly clogged up all the space in his runic items, something like a compression method for the data was needed.

'I could also try storing it on an external runic drive or something, could just carry it with me during the dungeon exploration or have the golem do it instead...'

Even while in a new location his head was filled with more runes. Now with things calming down, he could finally start innovating. Golems were not his end goal but only a part of his arsenal that he could expand.

'Maybe I should make a helmet for Agni when I'm back before we visit the mining area. He's probably not going to reach tier 3 in some time. He can use attack spells himself so some barriers to cover his weak spots.'

Roland could already imagine enemies being confused when a monster specializing in fire magic started using other elements out of the blue. Maybe in the future when Agni had his true growth spurt he could

fashion him a barding as he was getting to a size of being a possible mount. Finally, after about thirty minutes of wandering around, he had found an inn that looked passible.

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“You don’t have any rooms?”

“Sorry sir but you’ll have to look elsewhere.”

To his surprise, he was unable to get a room for himself even when he b-lined it for the closest inn he could find. When looking at the guests he noticed a small oddity, all of them looked like regular citizens and not adventurers. A thought crept into his mind but he could not confirm it yet so he headed to another establishment.

“Ah, I’m sorry we are all out of rooms, have you tried the Black Rose Inn instead?”

Soon he visited a second and a third inn which caused him to believe that the people in this city didn’t appreciate adventurers too much. All the places he visited had steeper rents than regular adventurers would be willing to pay.

‘Are they afraid that adventurers could cause property damage? There is no guild here either...’

While in a city with a proper adventurer guild they would have no choice to house the rowdy daredevils, in ones like this it was somewhat a risk. Adventurers tended to not be the educated sort that resolved most of their problems with force.

It was not surprising that they would be turned away if there were other clients the hotels could house instead. This city had a lot of merchants going through it so there was a large supply of people with deep pockets that didn’t have battle classes. It seemed that he would have to look towards the lesser establishments that did not have a problem with adventurers like him.

‘Next time I should probably remove this armor before wandering the city, I look like some vagabond knight...’

While walking out of one of the places that he was refused he could tell that the regular folk were looking at him. He was a large man dressed in shiny armor that was under a dark robe. It gave him the look of someone that shouldn’t be crossed, the innkeepers also seemed nervous when they conversed.

‘Can’t really blame them...’

Adventurers were a rowdy lot, many times they would get into fights which meant property destruction. Most of the time after it was over they would just flee the scene while the guards were too lazy to chase after them. Even Roland had gone through with some destruction when he beat up the party that hurt Bernir. Luckily for the tavern keeper, he received enough money to cover the destruction.

It seemed that he would need to lower his standards and seek another location. The people kept bringing up the black rose inn so after asking for some directions he headed towards it. This brought him to a louder part of the city where he could already see some people getting into fights.

‘So this is it huh...’

The sign was indeed a black rose, but one of the chains holding it had broken and the paint made the rose look more gray than black. The building was quite large though and without even entering he could already smell the cheap booze.

His instinct was telling him to turn around but if he needed to find a place to stay for the night. Luckily due to his imposing appearance, even the seedy-looking people averted their gazes when they saw him walking down the alleyways. Even thieves had enough sense not to try anything with an armored man wearing a sword on their side.

After arriving inside he quickly looked around to find the inn keep. There was quite a lot of space here that was mostly occupied by other people sitting around circular tables. Cheap booze was being served even though it was the middle of the day. In the back, he could see a set of stairs that probably led to the rooms that could be rented.

“What will it be?”

“Are there any free rooms?”

“There be, four small silver for the night, if ye want food with it it will be five.”

The gruff-looking man answered him while polishing some plates. There were some people that were eating but the food looked quite basic. It reminded him of the cheap inn that he used to stay in and the unseasoned meat he forced down each day to minimize his expenditure. After growing accustomed to Elodia’s home cooking it would probably be a lot worse this time around.

“No that’s fine, I’ll just take the room, do you have a curfew?”

“No.”

After dropping the four small silver coins he was given a key with a number attached to it. With there not being any curfew it meant that it would probably remain loud all until the night. Yet with the help of his sound blocking spell that wouldn’t be an issue.

“One bed with an old straw mattress and a window, this seems about right...”

He mumbled to himself after entering what looked more like a large closet than a proper room. There was enough space for the bed and for him to walk to it on the side. They clearly made the rooms as small as they could to save on space.

“It’s hard and this smell...”

Roland gave out a sigh after placing his hand on the bed he would be sleeping on. This was really a return to his roots of adventuring that he left behind. After having his own home and a close-by dungeon he started recalling all the bad sides of this type of work.

‘It’s just going to take a week or two, I’ll manage.’

With nothing else to do, he decided to take out his own sleeping bag that he had in his spatial backpack that also had a pillow inside. He had prepared some quality of life runic spells beforehand, one of them could get rid of the smell in this room and also purify the bed of any potential fungus.

This he did by just activating it through his palm, no chanting was needed as he could easily control everything through his runic armor. After everything was sterilized he finally sat down on the bed that now had his sleeping bag rolled out on it. The trip here took a few days so even he was tired thus instead of searching for food he decided to take a nap.

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“Stop running away you little shit!”

“Huh?”

While dreaming of himself riding an Agni covered from head to toe in golden armor he was abruptly awoken. Someone was shouting downstairs and turning the whole place upside down. The sun had gone down as he found himself in a pitch dark room with no light coming in.

“Get back here!”

“Wait... that voice...”

His room was somewhat close to the stairs leading up so he could hear everything. The sound canceling spell was not used by him this time around as he was actually tired enough to turn the quick nap into full-time sleep. The voice belonged to the large lady he spent the last few days with, it was her that was getting in some kind of fight.

While he could just ignore the whole scene for some reason he got interested in what was going on down there. If the barbarian lady got herself into trouble here it could also jeopardize the expedition, with one less gold rank to help along the way he would be forced to pick up the slack.

He did not want to get himself involved in squabbles between adventurers but not like he had anything better to do. Soon he was out of his room and going down the stairs on which a couple of people were already watching the spectacle and speaking. “Damn, that big one looks mad.”

“Hah, they are surely demolishing the whole place, that runt can is nimble though.”

“Think she will escape?”

“Probably not, her party members were taken out fast.”

Roland listened in on the conversation while walking forward. When he passed them he could finally see the flipped tables and chairs. Grisalde was there chasing after someone but he couldn't really see as that large body was blocking the view. Down on the ground, he could also see two people that were holding their faces, one of them was even bleeding from the nose.

‘Wait... is that?’

Familiar looking dwarf: “Aye, she clobbered me good”

Familiar looking human: “At least she didn't break your nose you idiot, damn it hurts.”

The two were slowly getting up from the ground while Grisalde was chasing after someone else from their group. Even though many years had passed Roland's high intelligence stat made him recall who these two men on the ground were. Their history was brief but they had gone through a life and death experience together which he still recalled.

'That woman is clearly drunk... do I really need to get involved?'

It wasn't set in stone that anything serious would come from her raging out. Yet she was injuring people for some reason if this continued it could end in an ugly fashion. She was someone above level hundred that could reach tier 3 soon. With the alcohol in her system, she could easily kill someone with those fists of hers.

Then there was the weapon that would probably be able to cleave people in half. If she was enraged even further than the two people that he knew could lose a limb.

'But who is she chasing around? Is it that sun elf?'

"Hey, I won fair and square, leave me alone!"

Then another familiar voice entered his ears, this one carrying a lot more memories than the two adventurers that were on the ground.

'Uh wait... could that be?'

After hearing the voice Roland moved closer towards the commotion. With some force, he pushed his way through the people that were cheering on the destruction. The familiarity of the people being involved made him interested enough to go check it out, perhaps he did need to get involved in this one.

Chapter 206: Old acquaintances.

"Leave me alone you musclebrain, I won that money fair and square it's not my fault that you are too dumb to understand a simple card game!"

"Shut up you runt, give me back my money!"

Roland's eyes were drawn away from the two familiar-looking men down on the ground to a voice that he found suspiciously similar to someone he knew. Yet where he expected to see that person instead there was another.

'Is that something like a halfling? She is really short...'

Finally, the mystery was cleared up, the barbarian woman had lost money in a game of cards. While perhaps cheating was involved it didn't seem that Grisalde had any proof. Probably after losing enough games in a row she finally snapped and started chasing the small girl around. While she did look young her age was unknown to him, the number of magical races in this world was quite staggering and hard to section off.

'Well, it would be too much of a coincidence if she was the one here, those two did form a team if I remember...'

While the chase was going on he turned his head towards the two men that had been clobbered. Both of them were slowly getting up, one was rubbing his chin while the other was holding the eye that he was popped in.

Name:

Dalrak L 84

Classes:

T2 Halberdier L34

T1 Shield Warrior L25

T1 Warrior L25

Name:

Orson L 86

Classes:

T2 Swordsman L36

T1 Sword Warrior L50

T1 Warrior L25

‘They did make progress in all those years, looks about normal.’

When he met these two all those years ago they were still steel rank adventurers, now they advanced into tier 2 and were approaching level one hundred. Yet his own speed compared to others was staggering as he had around forty levels above them.

Grinding the schematics and in high level dungeon areas while living in the city had truly put him above the average adventurer that did things slowly. The two probably went from one job to another without really paying attention if they were optimizing their leveling potential.

The ones that progressed faster weren’t the ones that worked harder but ones that did things smarter. One method, in particular, was to find bunched-up monsters and kill them in bulk for quick experience. It was similar to exploits in games where a player just pelted mobs from range without them being able to reach him.

‘Now what? Should I stop that idiot for old times sake?’

Roland was looking at the two get up from the ground. It was obvious that the person being chased belonged to their party. They would probably involve themselves with the barbarian woman that was just swinging her arms around while trying to catch the halfling.

If it was the old him then walking away would have been the most natural thing to do. Why would he get himself involved in a bar fight where he didn’t have anything to gain. But now after mellowing out at the city he realized that it wasn’t that bad to foster some bonds with other people.

Even now if he didn't meet Elodia he would not be able to take this task without revealing his true class. Others would think that he was a runic mage and a runesmith instead all thanks to his connections. He was only one man in a vast world in which the strongest could exert their will over the weak. Without any help from others, it would be a truly hard task to progress further.

Yet fostering good relations had its downsides like this one. The two warriors were on their feet and slowly looking towards their party member that could get herself killed by one punch from the barbarian woman. He was already a member of the caravan party and the large woman was a temporary party member.

While he didn't know her too well if things continued like this it could jeopardize the mission down the line. Working together with someone like this that started fights in cities they didn't know was not something he was looking forward to.

"Hey, giant woman, leave her alone!"

Before he could make a decision though, Orson started shouting in Grisalde's direction. The small person was quick to hide behind the two warriors from her party after seeing them recover from getting smacked down. It was three against one but he couldn't see the two being able to overpower someone that was over thirty levels over them.

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"Yeah, leave me alone, you tell her Orson."

"I see you two didn't have enough, now give me back my money and I might not break all the bones in your body."

Grisalde snorted after seeing the two men put themselves in front of the halfling girl he didn't know. This would have been a good moment to run for them but it seemed that they had their pride hurt and were willing to engage in some fisticuffs. Their weapons were on the ground which was good as then lives could be lost.

"That's enough, I think you have caused enough damage."

After assessing the situation he finally made his move. His voice was enhanced by some magic which caused the shouting onlookers to look towards the man in the shiny armor. From the outside, he looked like an armored knight wearing a dark robe over his body. The people standing directly next to him quickly stepped to the side, it was clear to them that something was about to happen.

"Oh, it's you? Stay out of this tin head these bastards owe me money and no one steals from me and gets away with it!"

"We need to focus on the job, the caravan is going to leave in a few hours, you should get some sleep, and..."

She cracked her knuckles while glaring at both him and the two warriors that were barricading the way towards the halfling girl. To make things even worse she peeked her head out from behind Orson while sticking her tongue out which Grisalde noticed.

His reply was met with deaf ears as she just bolted towards the location of the halfling girl. Both Dalrak and Orson looked at each other while nodding, it was clear that they were ready to take her on with the help of cooperating. While she was stronger they outnumbered her, if they treated her as a boss monster then perhaps victory could be achieved.

“For the love of...”

Yet Roland had enough of this charade and decided to step forward to place himself between the two feuding parties. A large fist was heading his way though as the large woman clearly didn't respect him enough to listen to his advice. But what she did not expect was that the person that was supposedly a runic mage moving his hand up to catch the fist.

Mages were considered one of the physically weakest classes of them all. They almost never received stat boosts in their strength stat while scoring minor gains with vitality and endurance. Thus she was quite surprised by the amount of grip strength that Roland was able to exert after he caught her strike mid-swing.

“I said that's enough.”

While he managed to stop her hand from colliding with his face he needed to use quite some of his own muscles to hold this fist in place. The woman had a similar level to his own but all of her classes were strength-focused.

Roland on the other hand only had his blacksmithing classes that gave him a moderately high amount of that stat. While his runsmith lord class had slightly better progression than regular tier 2 classes he still was held back by his mage and runic scribe class that didn't add much to his physical stats at all.

Without his better stat multiplier, he would be unable to make this muscular hand budge at all but at the time being, he was managing to hold it steady. That is until skills started being involved, after a moment he felt himself being overpowered. Her digits interlocked themselves with his fingers as they put themselves into an old-fashioned grip strength duel, one that he felt that he was losing.

Regretfully for the barbarian Roland was wearing his specialized armor that could boost him past what was humanly possible. The chest area of his armor started shining as a rune appeared that glowed blue. The people could not see this phenomenon due to his black robe but the magical light caused more runes to appear, their purpose was to amplify his strength beyond his body's capabilities.

This was similar to his first runic armor where he utilized colored mana stones. Now with the help of his aether alloy, he was able to make the whole process more inconspicuous. The stones had clear color patterns which showed his enemies which buffs he was using, now on the other hand his armor would always only produce pale blue light which only signaled that he was utilizing some kind of spell.

The crowd started cheering from the sides as they witnessed something spectacular. At first, it looked like the armored man was going to get his hand broken by the large muscular woman but after a moment the tables were turned around.

Even though the woman's muscles started to expand she was getting pushed back by his power alone. Yet even then she did not just surrender instead she reached out with her other hand. Roland was quick to intercept it with his own as the two continued to wrestle.

'Why do I always end up in these strength contests with muscle-brained idiots...'

He thought back to the time he fought with Armand and his brother Robert. For some reason even though he was a casting focused class he did get himself into these wrestling matches. As always though, he was on the winning end due to people underestimating his power.

'Will she go for a headbutt or for a kick... oh here it comes...'

But thanks to those encounters he already knew what was coming. When a person started losing in this type of struggle there were a few things they could do. Most of the time it was one of two things, either a kick towards the groin or a headbutt.

A rather mad-looking face was coming his way as the woman decided to hit his metal-covered head with her forehead. Normally this would be considered a stupid thing but with her current class, her head was probably as hard as iron. Yet, the moment it collided with that helmet a faint blue glow followed soon after.

Grisalde expected her opponent to be staggered back but instead, she felt her head spinning from the shock she received. Instead of his deepsteel helmet the headbutt connected with a magic shield that could counter kinetic attacks like this. When activated at the right moment it caused a rebound on the attacker that would suffer almost a double damage attack on themselves.

"Oh, she's down! Who is that person?"

"Sounded like they know each other, should we use this chance to escape?"

"Did you hear them talking, they are part of the caravan..."

"Shit..."

After the headbutt, Grisalde staggered back and had to go down to one of her knees. For a moment she was dazed. If he really intended to hurt her, he would have now sent a jolt of electric energy down her entire body to knock her out cold. But she was part of this expedition he was taking and part of his temporary party, this was enough to show her that he was not someone to be taken lightly.

Thus after she went down to the ground he decided to release his grip and let her go. With a step back he held his hands up to indicate that he did not wish to continue with this silly bar brawl. The words the people behind him muttered didn't go unnoticed either, it seemed that all of them would be seeing each other a lot more.

"Have you calmed down?"

"..."

She didn't answer him, instead, she started rubbing her wrists along with her head which was probably making her world spin. Her recovery was fast though as within a few seconds she was back to her feet and looking at him.

"I have misjudged you, you aren't half bad tin head but..."

"But you want your money back?"

He asked while turning to the three people that were standing behind him. From the conversation, he overheard they were probably part of the caravan as well. They were supposed to meet up with more people and take a couple more wagons towards their final destination.

“Let’s have a talk then.”

Roland said to the three while turning around, it seemed that the woman had cooled off after hitting her head hard but she was still dead set on getting that money. Thus it was best to see if the other party really did cheat or not and he would probably be the best middle man for this occasion.

“Hey guys, this doesn’t look good... shouldn’t we run?”

The halfling said while inching away but behind her was a group of people blocking the way. The entrance was also tightly packed as a lot of people had arrived to see the tavern brawl. Perhaps the smaller girl would be able to get away but the two men now had two high-level people to contend with. One was the scary barbarian lady and then the man that managed to push her down to the ground with what looked to be bare strength.

“I don’t think we have an option now...”

“No, you don’t. Now, how about we flip a table up and sit down?”

Roland replied while looking around, soon enough everyone realized that the fight was over which prompted them to finally go on their way. It really seemed that this wasn’t anything out of the ordinary even the innkeeper wasn’t complaining. Instead, the workers quickly moved in to turn the tables over, and with some help from the bystanders, the place was back to looking like a half-star restaurant.

‘I managed to get us here but now what...’

There was a small problem here, Orson and Dalrak were people that knew him from his old adventurer days. Then he went by his normal name of Roland but now he switched over to Wayland. If he revealed himself to them then there was a potential threat that could be tied to his location.

But on the other hand, he was starting to believe that the cult had already forgotten about his existence. With no threat from those lunatics, the only people giving him trouble would be his family members which these two would probably never had the pleasure of talking to.

“So, my money.”

“It’s not your money, I won it fair and square.”

“You still haven’t learned your lesson, pipsqueak!”

While he was contemplating his next words the two girls started arguing. It was quite a strange thing to see such a small halfling going against someone as big as this barbarian woman. Orson and Dalrak even had to place a hand over her mouth to make her stop screaming, she really did remind him of another over-expressive person he knew.

‘Are people of the smaller races just like this?’

He asked himself while also moving his hands towards his helmet. Before the talk started it was time to reintroduce himself to these two. This motion did not go unnoticed by everyone as they started to quickly stare at the mysterious metal man that was finally revealing his appearance.

“Hey not bad, I expected something more scrawny.”

Grisalde let out a whistle after seeing Roland’s rather handsome face that she probably did not expect a rune mage to have. The people on the other side didn’t seem as impressed though, which caused a slight pause before Roland spoke up. “Well?”

“Um, excuse me but do we know you from somewhere?”

“Huh? Don’t you recognize me?”

The two men looked at each other before going over Roland’s facial features again. Yet even when they continued to look they didn’t figure out who he was.

“Sorry, I don’t really care about other men that much...”

Replied Orson while the dwarf just nodded. It seemed warrior types didn’t have enough intelligence to keep track of all the faces they had seen through the years. Roland had also been a lot younger back then and not even achieved his first tier 2 class, so it was somewhat understandable.

“It has been some time but...”

It was time to give a short explanation to jog their memory...