

Runesmith 219

Chapter 219: Not over yet?

“What is that ... is this some foreign language? Those are some strange symbols and drawings, is it magic?”

“Could you stop doing that?”

“But it’s so boring.”

A bored halfling gave out a sigh while looking over the shoulder of a certain armored man who was scribbling something into a notebook.

“Leave Wayland alone, Senna, we will be there in a few hours.”

After Senna was shooed away by her party member Orson Roland was able to go back to his notes. These were the ones he took during his stay at the village taken over by the abyssal cultists. It described in detail the way the tier 2 ranked remote device worked along with its runic program.

Luckily Roland was well versed in the ways of copying runes. During his stay in the village, he had used those skills to copy over the medallion’s runic structure onto a piece of similarly shaped metal. Thanks to this he would be able to slowly analyze the inner workings later even if he didn’t fully go through the code yet.

The larger problem was the higher tier main relic that was used to create the illusion. It could pierce through high amounts of willpower and even affect someone that had divine skills like the swordmaster.

‘Yet that woman had mostly combat-focused classes so she might have not built up any mental defenses against attacks like that.’

He could not leave that option out, perhaps some tier 3 classes would be immune to the effect of that magical device if they had some specialized skills. His armor and runic spells that he applied to it were clearly not enough and he would probably need to replace them with tier 3 variants to have a chance.

‘But that’s only if I can’t figure out how this relic works, what are my options here...’

There wasn’t much to do during the trip to the city of Reeka. There had been no ambush as some of the other adventurers speculated and the whole journey was mostly boring. After a while, they found the main road and now could see vast farmlands which indicated that they were close to civilization. The volcanic earth here was high in nutrients for the plants and also gave them a red tint due to fire element influence.

Thus while looking at the fields he continued to ponder the problem. The easiest way he could think of would be to insert some kind of kill switch into his armor. If placed at a timer it could send out a signal to any potential abyssal cult relics. Yet that would only work if these devices were copies of each other with no variation.

There were various ways a runic craftsman could go around implementing safety measures into his items. One of them would be to make them unique in some way, a slight variation to the code could alter the turn-off switch.

This of course depended on the craftsman and their willingness to alter their design. Would the person that created these double helix towers do that? Was he the conscious type or did he just copy everything to cut on time. Altering a tier 3 runic structure was not easy, changing something in the code could potentially cause the device to malfunction.

‘By the way these cultists acted, their belief in that illusion was absolute.’

He thought to the two lazy guards that he easily killed after waking up. They were clearly not paying attention to his slumbering body. Either they were just lunatics enamored with their magical items or no one had given them a reason to doubt them. Perhaps the one time he managed to break through back in Edelgard was a first for them as well.

Luckily for him, his tier 1 status probably shifted their suspicion towards the tier 3 class holder that was there instead. He wouldn't be surprised if his old gnome boss took the brunt of their revenge afterward, if he was still alive until now was also debatable.

It was not a far-fetched idea if he considered the cult's ways. The higher the level the craftsman was the more conceited and hard-headed they got. Roland could see the person making these relics think they were infallible so they might have not bothered to change the 'perfect' runic code they made.

If they created the copies while believing that no one would be able to get their hands on the control medallions, then it would be feasible for him to create a countermeasure. He would only need to have his armor send out a signal to turn these runic relics off. This he could either do by making it do it constantly on a loop or make it react to the frequency the double helix was sending out.

The second option was the more difficult solution as he would need to get to the bottom of the tier 3 runic operating system. For the current him this was not possible as he lacked the skills to access tier 3 runes. Even if he had gone through a lot of theories he had no practice, the only person that could help him now was his acquaintance from the magic academy.

‘I'm still not sure if Loreena will involve that cat...’

His involvement in the cult relic was already known by this church member so he made a shot in the dark by proposing a rune mage that he knew. He could only wait a bit to see if they ever contacted them for help or if they used their own people to investigate. Runic mages were few far and in between so the cat's involvement was not out of the question.

‘To be on the safe side.’

Roland moved his hand into the satchel that had survived the ordeal. Inside of it, he had a few small things along with a certain magical scroll. Onto it, he started quickly scribbling a detailed recount of the incident with leaving out a few things he wished to keep secret. After he was finished he inserted his mana into a thumb-sized stamp on the side which caused the scroll to roll itself up while quickly turning into a green swallow afterward.

“Woah!”

Grisalde shouted out as she saw a small bird made from wind mana bolt into the sky. It carried a letter to Roland's runic teacher with some information about the relic. Even if the cat professor wasn't asked for help he might know the person that was. Due to the lack of runic mages in the kingdom, a lot of

them knew each other and exchanged research, it was not outlandish to believe that it was the same situation here.

“What are you surprised about, haven't you seen magic before or something? That's why country bumpkins like you are...”

“Are what you little shit? I dare you to finish that sentence!”

As always the two women adventurers got under each other's skin. This was not the first time and actually something that the other adventurers started cheering on. But the joy was short-lived as soon Senna squinted with her eyes and called out.

“Hey it looks like we are going to have visitors, there are a lot of them and they are heavily armored...”

Without trees in the way, his radar lost out to scout classes and their enhanced eyes. Yet even he could use similar ways to see further beyond. After peeking out from his cart, the visor he was using momentarily glowed in a blue light that caused the scenery to zoom into the distance.

“It looks like a group of mounted knights by the armor... is that the Valerian crest?”

“Nobles, this could be bad. What do we do?”

Senna called out to the people on the other wagons and to some that were walking on foot but in reality, her words were aimed toward one person. This person put away the notebook he was working on somewhat surprised that he was being asked the question.

“What can we do? Just keep your head down.”

Everyone nodded at Roland's words as they knew that they could not go against soldiers from the Valerian household. Even if there were no nobles or proper knights with them a commoner could not go against the ruling noble faction or their soldiers. Soon enough the now smaller caravan was forced to stop as it met with a force of about thirty mounted knights and various other mercenaries behind them.

“Halt, identify yourselves, who is in charge here?”

A man on horseback that was wearing the shiniest armor stepped forward while everyone waited. While he shouted the knights slowly started surrounding the carriages. There had to be some kind of order singling caravans like this out as normally soldiers would not have bothered and just passed by them.

“Answer me! Explain your selves.”

The man shouted again as there didn't seem to be anyone willing to speak up. To Roland's surprise when he looked to the people he was with, they continued to stare at him and between the soldiers.

‘Wait... am I the one in charge here?’

It took a second for him to realize what was happening. It wasn't strange that after the village incident he was considered to be the strongest fighter here. Even Grivalde that was easy to anger was just sitting there and not doing anything. Without the merchant and his guards, it was up to the next in line to lead this small group of people.

“If you don't want to talk then ...”

“Wait!”

Before the armored man could continue Roland finally decided to speak up. His armored self was hidden in the back of the forward wagon and only became visible to the soldiers after he walked forward.

“Before I answer, have you perhaps been tasked with securing the lost caravan going towards Reeka? The owner goes by the name of Reymund”

After Roland gave some information about the caravan and the name of its owner it garnered a reaction. The leader looked to one of the knights that nodded his head before the conversation continued.

“Are you insinuating that you are from that caravan?”

“Yes, as you can see, the wagons carry Mr. Reymund’s insignia with them.”

Merchants emulated noble houses by applying their own calling signs to their possessions. While they had no last name they would sometimes use their own and apply it to their wagons. The same applied here and if these knights were called here by the real owner then they were informed about this fact.

The old man had to have made it to the city with his guards at least half a day before they got here. It seemed that the one in charge of the city had assembled a task force to get to the bottom of this incident. In the front, there was a group of armored knights but there were also various others like adventurers following behind them.

“You seem to speak the truth.”

While he was thinking about this predicament the armored men continued to encircle them. Roland didn’t like this as they were quickly cutting off any escape routes that they could take. Not like he was inclined to charge at the soldiers belonging to a noble house, if he did even his noble roots might not help him.

“Is there a problem?”

He called out while everyone else also started getting concerned. Some of them like Grisalde were moving their hands towards their weapons.

“You will come with us, you are all under arrest, don't try to resist.”

‘I thought so...’

Roland could only sigh while looking at the shackles some of the other soldiers were pulling out. Even though they informed the other party about the truth they were only carrying out orders. This was probably the right decision from the leader’s standpoint. He had no way of knowing if the people here were telling the truth or if they were bandits in disguise. They were tasked with rescuing people from the village but instead, they suddenly showed up on their doorstep.

“We won’t...”

“Wayland, what are you doing?”

Roland just looked towards the people behind him that for some reason picked him up to be the leader.

“Do you want to run and live as a bandit or something? Just go along with it, if that merchant was really the one behind this rescue mission then we won’t spend that much time in the dungeon.”

His explanation had some merit so the other adventurers quickly agreed. Not like they could start a full-fledged battle with the people here, they would be turned into outcasts otherwise.

‘They are going to take my armor though...’

This worried Roland as the men with shackles approached he believed that they would confiscate all of his items which included the armor. Without it his battle power was seriously diminished and he would fare badly in a scuffle with a tier 2 class holder with a proper battle profession. However just as he was about to get shackled the ground began shaking.

“What is that?”

It was not an earthquake or any magical attack, no it was generated by horses. From behind another group of mounted riders quickly showed up as if they were following behind these soldiers. They were wearing very characteristic white armor with a red pattern depicting the sun.

“Are those Solarian knights... are they being led by a Paladin from the Golden Order?”

The soldiers halted in their advance as another force appeared out of nowhere. In the front, there was a magnificent-looking knight wearing golden armor. Without needing to think much he realized what was happening. The backup forces that Loreena had called for had arrived and were charging towards the village containing the abyssal relic.

“What’s happening... Are you sure that we shouldn’t run?”

Asked Senna while looking out into the distance at the large group of armored church knights. Their forces were double of the ones surrounding them. With how spooked everyone was after hearing about the church cleansing, some wanted to quickly run towards the hills. But unfortunately, they were surrounded and nothing but flatlands were here, they would certainly not run far even if they wanted.

“Run where? Just remain calm...”

He replied while looking towards the wagon, the large horse that was pulling it could be used for a getaway. But not many people would fit on it and he was still unsure about his safety. Would these church people turn out to be zealots and try to take them away?

If he had to choose he would rather go with the city soldiers as how the church operated was somewhat a mystery. They could be charged with some occult dealings and burned at the stake which he would like to avoid.

Soon they arrived and just as the soldiers did before them they started to encircle the whole caravan. They were now surrounded by two separate forces that were in a staring match with each other. Without being able to affect this situation he decided to listen in as his fate would probably be decided within the first few moments of the conversation between the leaders.

“We are from the Valerian Household, noble paladins from the Solaria Church. Could you explain your actions?”

The leader of the city soldiers stepped forward while remaining on his horse. He was being somewhat cordial with the larger force that also carried a lot of weight behind them. The Duke's house was very prestigious but if someone could go against them it would be these religious forces that worked under a different set of rules.

The person in the golden armor moved forward as well. Roland had to give it to the craftsman that created this magnificent plate mail. It was made from a superior metal and had many enchantments on it. Magical energy was radiating from it that could be felt by him, the item probably had various enhancements on it that reached tier 3.

This armored man slowly removed their helmet and held on to his side. This gesture revealed the mature man beneath, he had a full set of salt and pepper hair along with a long beard matching it. His face was devoid of any scars but the sharp and experienced look informed everyone about this man's battle-hardened past. Yet when asked by the soldier leader about their motives the man did not reply, instead he looked in Roland's direction before speaking out.

"You fit the description..."

Everyone instantly looked at the man wearing the shiny runic armor that was now being stared at by a tier 3 or higher Paladin. What this golden order paladin wanted from the adventurer was on everyone's mind and while they pondered the young man in question slowly realized what he was in for.

Chapter 220: Nobody Expects The Solarian Inquisition.

"It was me?"

If they were in a cartoon then a large question mark would appear above Roland's head. The old man had a similar frame to his father but was slightly shorter. Was devoid of scarring but there was a certain thing in his eyes that made him seem like a battle-hardened warrior that had made it through many battles with monsters and humans alike.

There was a clear difference in levels between them which Roland was unable to check with his analyzing skill. It was clear that just like the woman he met in the village he probably had an item that kept his status hidden away.

'Wait, did Loreena mention me to this person?'

This was the only answer he could come up with. The high leveled paladin singled him out almost instantly as if he knew him, probably the magical letters that she sent out had reached his hand. The question was what was in those letters, did she put in a good word for him, or was he about to get captured by the church instead?

"Young man, you are the one called Wayland are you not?"

While Roland's mind was racing to comprehend this man's motives the paladin arrived right before him. The soldiers from the city seemed offended but after taking one look at the man they backed away. This was obviously an inquisitor level threat to them, no one besides a proper noble would be able to go against them.

In this world of fantasy and magic, evil sorcerers, witches, and evil cults were quite real. It was up to the holy knights and priests to put an end to their dastardly deeds. Witches that performed evil curses were hunted down, evil cults were eradicated and anyone willing to aid them followed a similar fate. If an inquisitor found a person in cahoots with someone deemed a heretic then this person's life was forfeit. Even the soldiers here knew that with one word the paladin could turn their world into hell.

"That's right, I'm Wayland..."

Without having much choice he replied, the man's presence was truly tremendous. If he compared it to the creature he recently faced and the tier 3 woman he met then this person's presence was vastly superior. It was as if a large predator was glaring at him ready to bite his head off and he had no way of escaping.

"Remove your helmet."

"You want me to remove my helmet?"

"Yes."

If Roland was apprehensive about one thing was removing his helmet and showing his face to people that he did not know. Many years had passed since the old incident with his family but this trait still was with him. He was slowly working on it yet even in the city he lived in he mostly covered his face partially by a hood.

"How dare you make the inquisitor repeat himself!"

His character flaw of not seeing people above him differently made him cause a scene. One of the shiny white knights that was with this old man didn't appreciate the lowly uncultured adventurer's response. Roland could even see the man move his hand towards his sword ready to strike him down.

Luckily the old man that was now revealed to be an actual inquisitor raised his hand which caused the knight to stop shouting and to back off. This was probably his chance to show some respect thus he begrudgingly decided to go ahead with the request. There was no way of running away and if a scary inquisitor was asking for something it was probably better to capitulate.

"Hm...?"

The old man's eyes met with Roland's almost instantly he thought that he was looking at some kind of beast. This was a difficult sensation to describe but even without his analyzing skill, he could feel that the gap between him and the old man here was vast as an ocean. He had felt a similar way a few times in his life, once when he met the tier 3 cult members that almost killed him or when encountering the tier 3 ant queen.

'Could this person be above tier 3?'

The man's eyes glowed with a golden sheen which caused his spine to tingle. His knees started to shake and he felt like dropping down to his knees. Yet after taking one step back he managed to catch himself to power through it.

Tier 3 was the barrier that Roland was attempting to cross. This was one of the reasons that he had tossed himself into this short adventure to rank up. While not by much, having a higher adventurer rank

would aid him in this goal. It was considered to be the first step into becoming an elite in this world and enough strength to walk with a head held high.

Nevertheless, this was not the end of it all, there existed levels and realms of power above it. Not many were able to cross it but there existed a small number of masters that were able to reach tier 4. Just like with the other classes the requirements were doubled, instead of fifty, a person needed one hundred levels to maximize on a tier 3 class.

If this man was an actual tier 4 class holder would mean that his level was at minimum three hundred and fifty-one. This was not something a person possessing a battle class could achieve easily without tossing themselves into countless battles and surviving. Yet the feeling of the chasm between them didn't go away, could this person truly be this monstrous?

"Hoh? Impressive."

The man called out while going even closer, to Roland's surprise after the eye stare down that he did not break the man's armor began glowing. This glow was similar to his own and was followed by mystical characters similar to runes glowing on that golden armor. This magical effect took shape fast and surrounded both him and the inquisitor in a small magical bubble that seemed to be meant to keep people from the outside from peeking in.

"Not bad, I guess if you're related to that old bastard then it makes sense."

"Huh? Old bastard?"

The man in shiny armor moved closer and placed his hand on Roland's armored shoulder. At first, it seemed that he wanted to help him up but instead, he delivered a smack to it which sent him down to the ground.

"I must thank you for keeping my stupid grandchild safe, I told her to be careful when dealing with those cult bastards but does she ever listen to her old man?"

His armor shook violently as the man's large mitt hit him. It felt like he was hit by a baseball bat, if he was not a high-level tier 2 class holder then his shoulder would have been either broken or dislocated instantly.

"Grandchild? D-do you mean Loreena?"

"The same, I got her letter and rushed over! She said that she was aided by a man in armor and to think it was someone like you? Tell me boy, how does that old bastard Wentworth fare? Are you his son? or perhaps a grandchild? You do look similar but luckily you aren't half as ugly as him, ho ho ho!"

The man was overly chatty for some reason and started laughing as if he was a certain fat old man dressed in red. Yet after one name was mentioned it sent Roland's mind spinning, Wentworth was the name of his father. By how this old man was referring to him by his name and even calling him an old bastard then they had to be old friends.

'Is this some kind of old war comrade of my 'father'? This could be bad... Will he try to drag me back to the estate? Wait... he probably only saw my last name but he doesn't actually know who I am...'

It was clear that the inquisitor here had seen his status page. This was the first time the magical item that he received from the gnome had failed him. He had to consider that his whole name of Roland Arden was known to him. The man seemed to recognize his facial features that were also similar to his father's which made it hard to dodge the assumption.

Claiming that he was from some far-away family would be hard if he looked similar to Wentworth Arden. Yet this brought another question to Roland's mind, should he actually care about his father finding him at this point? He had already gone down the path of a Runesmith that would make it impossible for him to become a knight.

Would he even be forced to abandon his current home? He was a lowly fourth son of a baron with not much worth. Normally his fate would have been to join the knight academy like his older brother Robert. There he would become a soldier to slowly gain merits and finally probably be forced to marry a daughter of a merchant or some lower noble to garner better relations.

But with his current status as a runesmith, this path would be hard to proceed in. He had no proper training when it came to noble relations so his family would probably wish to hide his presence at this point. It wouldn't be strange if they just left him in the backwater village just like Arthur Valerian was sent away.

"Man of a few words? You really do take after him... Roland is it? Was there a brat with a name like that or are you perhaps..."

While Roland was racking his brain about his response the man continued to talk. It seemed before he could even answer the inquisitor came to some kind of conclusion as he smacked his shoulder yet again.

"Oh, so that's it! That scoundrel! It must have been hard for you!"

"Huh?"

"To think that bastard would go around producing more offspring than he already has, he really is an ogre!"

"Um... what?"

The more the man talked the more he was confused. For some reason, the high-ranking church member he was facing had a vivid imagination. Without being able to remember Wentworth's children he presumed that Roland was a bastard son made out of wedlock. This was not uncommon as many nobles sired children that they let out in the world to fend for themselves. This made Wentworth Arden look bad but was a good resolution to the situation.

"Don't worry boy, when I meet your father I'll be sure to..."

"No please don't!"

The old man started shaking his fist while talking but before he could continue Roland shouted out to stop him. He did not want to have this scary man go to his father, one mention of his name would reveal his secret. Even though he wasn't as afraid of meeting up with his old man again as he was in the past, this was something that he still wished to postpone as much as he could. The best would be after he achieved tier 3 status and would not be that easily bullied.

“Is that so? It seems that you do not wish me to speak to that bastard of a father of yours, very well! This old man will do so!”

“Ah? Yes, thank you.”

To his surprise, the man was quick to accept the proposal but even then Roland was not sure what would happen if he ever met his father. How deep was their relationship and how often did they run into each other. The man was a high-level church inquisitor that could even order noble armies around. He probably did not have that much time on his hands to talk and he could not see how his stoic father would enjoy the company of a blabbermouth like this.

“You must forgive this old man, your name brought back old forgotten memories. What I wish to ask you was not about your lineage but about the Abyssal Cult, Loreena’s letter brought some things to light but I would like to hear your recount of the event.”

“Yes Sir.”

“Sir? Just call me Bartholomew.”

“Um, Sir Bartholomew then...”

“Ho ho, have it your way then.”

After receiving a few more smacks to his poor shoulder that felt like it was about to break Roland gave a recount of the situation. It was a very similar tale to what he told Loreena but this time around he was a lot more nervous. Even though this man was acting like a nice grandfather it could have been all an act.

He was also an inquisitor that probably had experience in interrogating people, perhaps he would see through his lies if he tried. This he avoided by constructing his sentences in such a way that he would not be caught lying. Instead of mentioning his debugging skill he only confirmed that he found the core rune to disable the illusion. Loreena’s self-named grandfather just kept nodding all the way until he was finished with the story.

“I see, I must thank you again! But I also must ask you to keep this a secret.”

“Of course.”

“I didn’t think that I would meet such a lad like you here, a reward is called for but I did not take anything worthwhile with...”

“If I may speak?”

“Oh go ahead, do you have something in mind?”

“Yes, if it's a reward... could you keep my involvement in this incident a secret?”

“Hoh, you do not wish to be named? ... I see very well.”

Roland took the opportunity to ask for a small favor. Riches was not what he wanted but if his name could be kept from the records then perhaps it could keep him safe in the future. After meeting this man he realized that this incident could be bigger than he anticipated. This whole region could turn into a fighting ground as the cultists would surely not allow the church to get their hands on their relic.

“This has been a good talk but I must now be on my way, those cultist snakes have to be taken care of!”

Roland was not sure about what conversation he was talking about as it was mostly one-sided babbling from the old man. Even when he tried to give a recount of what happened he was interrupted many times. Luckily it seemed that he was in no danger of being taken in for further questioning as the barrier around them was removed.

“Everyone, we are leaving!”

Bartholomew moved back towards his horse while everyone else kept quiet. The church knights started moving back into formation towards the area where the cultist-run village was. Before leaving there was another lucky turn of events as this was not the end of the man’s orders.

“You belong to the city guard, right?”

“Y-yes sir inquisitor.”

He called out to the leader of the knights that had come here first.

“You shall come with us, we need more able men to contend with this blight.”

“But the Lord has ordered us to...”

“You dare refuse the order of the Inquisitor?”

The knight that was here quickly shrunk back as the same church knight that previously shouted at Roland turned towards him now. Bartholomew had the power to force forces like this to move on his own accord.

“I dare not! But what about these...”

“They do not belong to the cult, I feel no presence of the abyss here let them pass.”

Bartholomew put on his helmet and after glancing in Roland’s direction. For a moment his eyes focused on the young man before he signaled his horse to move forward. The rumbling of hooves resumed as the whole place cleared out, even the hired mercenaries and adventurers followed after the church knights that were the leading force here.

“Wayland... what... how?”

The predicament was over and almost instantly the adventurers swarmed around Roland. They all started shouting and asking questions. How was it possible for an adventurer like him to catch the eye of an inquisitor? It was baffling to them but to the man himself, it wasn’t much different.

‘What just happened here...’

Roland could only shrug his shoulders as he didn’t know how to react. Was he supposed to be shocked, stressed, or reassured that the scary inquisitor didn’t burn him at the stake? One thing was for sure, he needed to get out of here quickly and get back to his home...