

Runesmith 221

Chapter 221: Mission debrief.

A gentle breeze flew past his hair while he glanced into the distance. The rumbling of the horses had already calmed down but the conversation he had with the inquisitor felt like a dream. How could such a person have appeared before him just like that and be involved with his father Wentworth Arden?

His father was a famous knight that had gained power almost exclusively through military conflicts. Even though his age was close to eighty he still looked like someone in his late forties. The increase in his levels allowed him to keep his body youthful and battle-ready.

The inquisitor seemed to know him well and looked to be about the same age. This was even harder to pinpoint as besides having a high level he was a Paladin that had contact with various divine artifacts and elixirs that could prolong one's life even more. In which conflict the two had met he had no idea but they had certainly worked together.

'Did they take part in some skirmishes with other cults in the past?'

Roland tried to think back to some conflicts in the past that his father could have taken part in and where the church was involved in. Yet while he was contemplating this issue the people around him were getting rowdy.

"Did that Inquisitor wipe his mind with that interrogation skill?"

Orson asked while Darlak quickly replied while the two stared at Roland.

"Did he? Not like he talks a lot, to begin with, just give the lad some time."

His stoic responses were already known to the adventurers but after seeing him surrounded by a shell of divine energy it wasn't surprising. An inquisitor picked by the church had certain skills that could force people to talk. In their eyes, the inquisitor had interrogated Roland by the use of some mind-affecting skill that could have caused mental damage.

"Did his brain turn to mush? Can I get his magic items if he doesn't recover?"

Asked Senna which caused Roland to furrow his brows when looking at the halfling.

"You know that I can hear you, right?"

Senna just smiled while skipping away as if she was scared. Soon everyone looked toward their temporary leader. It was clear to him that they wanted an explanation but he surely would not disclose that the inquisitor knew his father or that he was a noble. It wouldn't be hard to lie about the exchange as everyone had preconceived notions about the people from the golden order.

"I don't know, he used some skill on me, and then everything went dark. The next thing that I remember is him walking away."

"Damn bastards doing what they want."

Grisalde's loud voice was heard by everyone as she slammed her fist into the side of the wagon. The others could just nod at the explanation which made a lot of sense.

“Wayland looks fine though? Maybe the rumors about those skills being dangerous were false?”

Orson commented while looking between Roland and the mad Griscalde.

“At least they left without throwing us into the dungeon, I don’t know about you but I’m famished let us depart toward the city.”

Darlak said while looking toward Roland. It was as if he was waiting for a confirmation from the leader.

“Yes, we should go, those soldiers were probably sent here by the merchant.”

“I hope that bastard still intends to pay us!”

This time around Senna was the mad one, she along with Griscalde nodded at each other while agreeing. The two didn’t seem to like each other but when it came to money they were quick to see past their disagreement. The other participants from the caravan were all tired too without needing to tell them twice, they all soon departed towards the city of Reeka.

Thus they finally arrived at their final destination. This city was a massive hub of commerce through which many caravans like this one came through. They would stock up on all sorts of items and head out to the smaller towns to bring in vast amounts of profit.

A nearby port with access to fast ships added to the city’s prosperity but this was not all. This area was purposely created in a place a dungeon had sprung up which hastened the progress and made a lot of money flow in for the city’s development. Even now as Roland and his companions were approaching the city gates they could see the results.

“So this is Reeka the city of merchants?”

“Did it have that name?”

Orson asked Senna that brought up the name.

“Yeah, that’s why don’t even think about heading out alone, you’ll probably get scammed by some whores like last time.”

“Hey, you said that you wouldn’t bring it up again!”

“I’ll stop bringing it up when you stop acting like an idiot, why did I even decide to join you two simpletons. One is a drunkard and the other is a pervert...”

“A dwarf is not far away from his liquor.”

Darlak just laughed from the side while Senna was grumbling and didn’t seem to mind being called a drunkard.

“This place is run by the merchant guild, it’s more similar to the thieves guild if you ask me. Those bastards will squeeze everything out of you if they can...Then there are the nobles...”

Roland was on the side listening to the banter between the two adventurers. It seemed that this was the first time they were here as well. Senna was clearly the information gathering type that knew a few things about the island they had arrived on.

This was nothing new to him as he had stayed on this side of the kingdom for a few years already. This city was a bit similar to Edelgard but instead of craftsmen, there were various other venues that brought in money and exotic wares.

“Halt! Let me see your papers.”

After arriving at the gate the soldiers asked them for their identification. Being the impromptu leader Roland had to deal with it. Thankfully the city had been alerted to the cult drama that had been happening and he only needed to show his adventurer card to explain himself.

With the help of smaller merchants that had also survived the journey, it didn't seem that they would have trouble with going in. While conversing with the soldiers the large Valerian Noble crest on the entrance gate didn't go unnoticed. This was a large city that brought in vast quantities of money, this money could be quickly spent in the auction houses that the noble family was known for.

“You seem to be speaking the truth, we will escort the carts to where they can be examined by the merchant in question, it would be best if you report to the adventurer's guild and inform them.”

The guard said while letting them through, with this their journey was almost over but a few things needed to be ironed out.

“We need to make a report to the guild, they should help us clear things out with that merchant.”

Roland commented while checking if he did not leave anything behind. Besides the satchel filled with some money, magic crystals and his notes he still had his runic weapons. The staff he used was recovered but had been bent out of shape. His armor's runes had degraded due to overloading them and using the mending skill but he would still be able to protect himself.

“They better, they should pay us double for what we went through.”

Grisalde said with a grimace on her face, even now the barbarian was unsure about being paid. Darlak that was walking behind her and chuckled.

“You're a big dreamer my large friend!”

“Shut up dwarf.”

‘After a contract is signed there won't be any increase in the wage even if the adventurer suffers greatly.’

Darlak was telling the truth, the only way of increasing the payout would be to make a custom contract. This document would require specific clauses to alter the amount of money the adventurers were getting. Contracts like that were not made for short expeditions like this, they were mostly in the favor of the person creating the job.

It was a harsh world where most people weren't willing to help each other out. Even if the adventurer perished during the mission their money would not be added to the wages nor given to their family members. Only when adventurers started gaining fame and reached higher ranks could they hope for better deals.

This was also one of the reasons that Roland saw rising his adventurer rank as a longer-term benefit. With a higher rank, he could start choosing his jobs and enter places to level up faster. Only with a high rank could he continue to gain power in the dungeons and power was still something he needed.

While he had access to tier 3 monsters back in Albrook he needed to think about the future. At any point, his secret could be discovered or some phenomenon in the dungeon could close the fissure. If that happened he would not be able to gain easy experience from a safe distance anymore.

‘This place looks packed.’

“Are they getting rowdy in there?”

Orson commented from behind Roland who halted for a moment. For some reason, his old acquaintances and the two women that disliked each other were still sticking to him. This was already the end of the road, the mission was over. What remained was to go to the adventurer guild and present their adventurer cards along with the contracts.

“What dungeon grade does this city have, was it a C+?”

“Oh, so you don’t have straw for brains, after all, I’m surprised you remembered!”

Senna laughed at Orson who just rolled his eyes. Roland could not understand why the two men were fine with this loudmouth being around them but perhaps they had a long-lasting history that he was not aware of. It was not that rare for adventurer parties to form after they went through a life and death event, this was also how Orson and Dalrak began their friendship.

“We should go in before the other adventurers arrive, it might take a while until they get our issue resolved.”

Roland was the voice of reason as he took a step towards the large adventurer building. It was three times the size of the one back at Albrook and probably had ten times the number of adventurer’s inside. The dungeon might not have been that much higher rated than the one back at his home but the city was vastly better.

Adventurers were able to get all types of missions here. It was a trade hub that let them attempt the easier transport missions with caravans like the one he just finished. Then there was the dungeon that actually possessed a few tier 3 monsters at the end. Gold ranked adventurers could face off against the boss to gain some valuable experience and even platinum ones remained for the same reason.

The door swung open before he could step through it. Before him were a few armored men with rough-looking faces and even rougher-looking weapons. They did give him the stink eye but soon enough walked past him without starting a fight. This was quite the sight for sore eyes as the moment the door opened he could already smell the scent of sweaty adventurers.

It was a strange feeling, such a place filled with mostly uncivilized people would be seen as vulgar. Most nobles would scoff at the sight of drunk unwashed adventurers laughing out loud while talking about fighting monsters. Roland on the other hand was different, to him the noisy adventurers were a better fit to keep him company.

They had a clear goal and their motives were easy to read. In contrast, nobles tended to always have some kind of hidden agenda that could come to the surface at a random point in time. It wasn't strange for them to hide behind words like honor and duty. Yet in actuality, they were performing tasks to rise up in the ranks not by their own strength but by realizing others in to do the dirty work.

Secret contracts between powerful families to bring down others were something any noble needed to account for. No one could be trusted and rarely could they be bought with things like money. On the other hand, the adventurers were simple creatures that had lesser aspirations and could be easily influenced by money.

“Those lines seem packed...”

“Yeah, think it will be better if we split up.”

Senna and Orson commented while everyone headed towards the guild receptionists. He did the same and after about twenty minutes he was just a step away from being done with this cursed mission. His life had been endangered far too many times and he still needed to pass his test.

“How can I help you?”

“I would like to complete a mission.”

“Of course, please give me your contract and your adventurer card, if you have lost your contract you will still be able to complete the mission if you have your contract identification number...”

The guild receptionist reminded him of his woman that was back home. She quickly listed down all of the possibilities as she clearly noticed that he was not from this city. Adventurers losing their contracts was not that rare but there were workarounds. Just like she had stated if he had the contract ID that corresponded to one that was here, there would be no problems. The transport mission's destination was this city so the corresponding contract would be stored here.

“I have the contract and the ID but also, here...”

Roland's contract was a little bit different this time around as this was his rank advancement test. Normally the person that the guild had sent on the journey with him would have taken care of everything but she turned out to be a secret agent from the church. Luckily he had received a sealed letter that was supposed to get him through this predicament.

“This is...”

The woman first looked at the contract and the adventurer card to confirm the validity of the person before her. Then she moved on to the strange letter that she wasn't sure what to make off. It was a strange sight for Roland, he could see the woman's eyes getting wider the moment she laid her eyes on the letter's seal that clearly belonged to the church.

‘I was lucky that Loreena's golden order seal was left behind in one of the wagons.’

Loreena's items that she had on her body were partially destroyed during the fight but luckily for him she had left her traveling bag in the wagon. In the bag, she had various utensils that she could use to prepare a proper letter. The receptionist here could clearly tell that the seal on this letter was from a high-ranking church member that was related to the inquisitors.

“Please wait a moment, I’ll be right back Sir!”

Just as he expected the woman here was not high enough on the guild’s food chain to open the letter. The only person that was allowed to fiddle with the seal would be the guild master or a high-ranking member of the church. Thus he just nodded and allowed the woman to quickly run into the back.

‘Hope the guy isn’t away...’

The guild master of an adventurer guild was mostly swamped with work. They were somewhat retired adventurers that at least reached the platinum rank. As one of the elite, they were sometimes tasked to keep order or join various events that even involved the nobles. If the guild master was out then he might have to spend some time here waiting.

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“What is it?”

“Guild Master, an adventurer returned from a mission carrying a letter with a seal from the Golden Order.”

“Oh, they did? Did anyone else notice it?”

“No sir, I’ve brought it here first as you’ve instructed.”

“You did well, please wait outside.”

“Yes, sir.”

A dandy-looking man with reddish hair was leaning against a large chair. Before him was the letter that Roland had received from Loreena. Only when the guild worker left his office did he open up the letter. His eyes darted through the handwritten letter that was quickly burned to a crisp.

“... Interesting to catch that woman’s eye, this person named Wayland must be unusual...”

The man removed the monocle that he used to go through the letter and started rubbing his chin in contemplation. Soon he nodded to himself and quickly called the guild receptionist back into his office.

“Allow this person to pass the rank advancement, also bring me a copy of his adventure card and all of the information that our guild has on him. Do it discreetly, do you understand?”

“Yes sir!”

Soon the large office door closed behind the guild worker that sped down the stairs. It seemed that the person below was no normal adventurer. Who he was was unknown but it was clear that he could not be anyone normal.

“Interesting... It seems that we might be in for some turbulent times...”

Chapter 222: Golden Rank Achieved.

“So this is it?”

“Yes Mr. Wayland, congratulations on passing your test and achieving the gold rank.”

Roland looked at his adventurer card which now had a golden outline on it. After the woman he talked to vanished for about ten minutes she rushed back down to proclaim that he had passed. What Loreena wrote in the letter was unknown to him but it seemed to have impressed the current guild master.

Even the process of updating his card was hastened, already after an hour of waiting everything was in order. The best part about it was that he did not need to get his status red for the update. This was something that he expected as the status check was done before the test was supposed to start. With the help of a certain sun elf back at his home he was able to go around this.

“Thank you.”

“Would you like me to explain the benefits of the gold adventurer rank?”

“Ah well, that’s fin...”

Before Roland could finish his sentence the guild worker was already blabbing away the information that he was already familiar with.

“Now that you are a gold rank adventurer you can choose to take a leadership role in small expeditions! You will be free to command lower ranked adventurers and receive higher rewards if placed in such a role!”

Bronze, Steel and Silver grade adventures were quite common and mostly seen as common foot soldiers. Now after reaching the gold rank an adventurer was seen as more experienced and with a future. This was the rank just before tier 3, it was the last step before the world of elites opened up.

This reminded him of one of his earlier adventurers in the ant-infested mines. There a group of gold rankers took over the show and instructed him, who was only a steel grade adventurer. They just sent them out as scouts without much thought about the dangers while waiting. Now he could actually join those types of expeditions and be the one giving orders but did he want to?

‘That does seem like a bother but...’

There were pros and cons to being a leader. On one hand, he could direct the forces as he wished to complete the task at hand in the way he wanted. On the other hand, if the mission failed he would be held accountable for any deaths or failures. It was a double-edged sword that mostly fell in favor of the higher rank as they were able to save their life by using lower ranks as meat shields.

“With your gold rank card, you will be able to purchase potions and various other necessities at a higher discount...”

The woman continued to list things that he already knew. With Elodia back home he already had a living encyclopedia that he could ask about all things related to the guild. One big change that the woman didn’t mention was concerning tamed beasts like Agni.

The Ruby Dire Wolf was over level 100 and only if their master was a gold rank adventurer could his pet be officially allowed into the city. This would require more paperwork and a special harness with a muzzle as he was a wolf-type monster with a strong bite. This would not be a problem for a blacksmith like him who could easily create one. With a few modifications, he could even make it come off automatically so if Agni found himself in trouble he could just use his mana to take it off.

“Thank you but I know all of this already, if that’s all then I will excuse myself.”

“Ah... please come again!”

Roland decided to interrupt the woman as she continued to babble on. The job that he concluded was still under review but he would not receive any rewards anyway. Due to it being a rank-up test he wouldn’t be receiving any more than this. Money was not what he came here for though and this would allow him to leave this city earlier than any other participant.

“Hey, Wayland!”

While walking away from the guild receptionist he heard a familiar voice that belonged to a fellow adventurer. It was Orson waving to get his attention, his entire party with an additional berserker were all there eating and drinking up.

“Are you finished? Have a drink with us lad.”

Dalrak laughed while moistening up his beard with some cheap beer. They all had clearly finished up giving their reports and were now winding down. This adventurer guild was a lot larger than the one back home and this cantine area was the same. It was mostly full with some empty chairs here and there.

‘I guess I haven’t eaten anything in a while...’

The moment he saw the food on the table he could feel his belly rumbling. The fresh food that Elodia had prepared for him before the trip was already gone and he was stuck with dried meat and bread.

“How is it?”

“Hah, what does it matter, food is food!”

As he sat down he turned in Grisalde’s direction, the large woman was munching on a drumstick belonging to an unidentified bird. It was a lot larger than one that belonged to a chicken and could actually belong to a monster. Monster meat was mostly too tough to eat but there existed some weaker ones that could actually be raised.

“I guess you are right, excuse me, can I have one of those too?”

He nodded before calling the waitress over. Though he had gotten used to the seasoned food prepared by Elodia, eating roasted bird from time to time wasn’t bad. When among other adventurers in heavy armor and a muscular barbarian woman he didn’t seem that out of place even when wearing this shiny armor.

“So, how long do you think they will make us wait?”

Asked Orson after taking a swig from his mug.

“I’m sure that merchant will try to weasel out of paying in full even though we recovered most of the merchandise.”

Replied Senna that was poking a piece of meat with a knife.

“We might be stuck here for a while, why don’t we visit the dungeon later?”

Said Dalrak while laughing. Roland was listening in without saying much, this was quite a large incident that could take a while to resolve. It mostly depended on the merchant that could just fork up all of the money they were owed. If not the guild might have to confiscate some of the merchandise and sell it before giving the adventurers their wages.

“Maybe if someone didn’t drink all of the liquor from the carts it would go faster.”

Senna narrowed her eyes when looking at Darlak. At this moment Roland recalled how the dwarf had probably gone through most of the booze by himself. He was probably the only one that didn’t partake in the drinking as he preferred tea or just regular water.

“Hah, can’t blame a dwarf for quenching his thirst!”

“What about you Wayland, are you going to stay?”

“Me? I’m not sure...”

While Senna was arguing with Darlak, Orson posed a question to Roland who was going through the drumstick he ordered. He had done some thinking about his next step which mostly took him back to his own city.

“I was planning on leaving but I’m not sure if it will be that easy...”

“So you want to go back? That will be a problem with the inquisitors running around, all the paths back will be blocked off that would leave you with a few choices.”

“Right, either I take the long way back or take the ship...”

“Yeah, they will probably make it difficult for anyone that isn’t a resident from going on the ship though.”

“That’s a possibility.”

Roland had a quick back and forth with Orson that continued to look drunker with each passing moment. They had managed to enter the city right after the incident had occurred. Not everyone was informed about the situation so they managed to evade any integration attempts yet.

‘That inquisitor was on my side but this doesn’t mean that others will act the same, staying here for too long might be unwise.’

While these four didn’t seem to be bothered by the run-in with the cultists Roland was not so relaxed. He expected the forces of the evil cult to clash with the Solaria worshipers. Even the city could be turned into a battlefield if it gets out of hand, this depended on a few factors.

‘Do they have enough forces on this island to go against those church knights? Will they just abandon their precious relic or quickly scramble to take it back?’

Roland did not know much about the cult, they were quite the secretive bunch. But at this time they were out in the open, they could not remain hidden away if they wanted their biggest secret to being

revealed. If the church managed to figure out how the relic operated they might be able to counter any future mind-affecting attempts.

'It will probably not trouble them instantly...'

Even if the relic was decoded the specialized equipment would not come cheap. Probably only high ranking church members would have it with them. This would really not help their victims that would still not be able to do anything about the illusion trigger.

'They could wait and also take the relic when it was being transported but the church has the resources to protect it...'

"So you coming or not?"

"Huh?"

"There you go again, spacing out into your little own world, I said, are you coming to have some fun!"

His thoughts were interrupted by a visible more drunk Orson that was grinning now. By how the man was licking his lips while talking about the fun, he already knew where this was going. Orson was a man that followed his basic instincts, this mostly consisted of getting drunk and going to the whorehouse.

"I think I'm going to pass."

"Hah, suit yourself!"

Night was arriving and it was time to split up. The three adventurers that he arrived with were getting rowdy. Even though they didn't receive their payment they still had some money. Without much to spend it on, they were probably going to hit the city for more drinking and entertainment. This was something that Roland had grown out of, with his combined age he was already over forty.

"It was fun working with ya~"

Senna called out to him while heading over towards the party of four. For some reason, Grisalde was also sticking with the group that she seemed to dislike. Perhaps she was reeled in with some promises or another bet that she would probably lose again.

With that he was alone again in a city he did not know and without a proper means to return home. Normally he would take the first caravan back home as a passenger or sign up to be a bodyguard like in the previous mission. All of those caravans went through the nearby village that was filled out with church soldiers now. They would certainly not let them enter the forest that they needed to pass through.

'I need to restock...'

The satchel he had only had a few mana potions and healing potions remaining in it. He had enough money to last him a while but he did not want to be stuck for a month here. If the church decided to create a makeshift base in the village it could block people from using the old route for quite some time. It seemed that the fastest way of getting out would be the ship.

'It doesn't seem that they are implementing martial law, or at least not making it too obvious, also who was that Paladin? I should probably do some research...'

While he had been saved by the high level church inquisitor, the man's origin was unknown. Would he listen to his plea and not disclose that he met him in the middle of nowhere whenever he visited his father? Was there even a possibility of the man seeing his old man unless a war broke out?

'People like them should be busy, I can't imagine a Paladin like that heading to noble parties to mingle with people... but he could always send him a letter...'

His cover could have been blown and he would not be able to do anything about it. His only choice was to wait and contact his older brother Robert. If his father found something out then the only person he could confirm this information with was Robert. Which made things difficult as he was busy performing his duties as a proper soldier in the kingdom.

With being low on the totem pole he would probably not be able to give him much information. Without the knowledge of what was waiting for him, Roland knew that he would be stressed out. This he could only work on by himself by preparing for the unexpected. When he returned home he already knew that he needed to toss himself back into the dungeon and level up as fast as he could.

'I should check out the pier first.'

It was close to sundown, everyone else that came for the trip was either waiting in line or out in the city's pleasure district. To them there was no rush, the cultists were dead and they could just use the nearby dungeon to get some coins. Roland on the other hand needed to have an exit strategy if for some reason the cultists appeared in the city like in Edelgard. There was a low possibility of this as with the appearance of the golden order they would be busy for a while.

Thus his first option of getting back home was the port. Luckily this city came equipped with it and the ships here should be leaving for the port town that he visited when he first arrived on this island. The adventurer guild had a detailed map of the city hanging on the wall to help anyone that was new find their way. With the help of his good memory, he quickly noted down the important areas.

'This is a lot bigger than the ports I have visited before.'

The walk towards this side of the city took him about half an hour. The whole city was sectioned off into three main parts. One of them was the main noble castle where the reigning noble and his army resided. Some rich merchants and lesser nobles also had villas and houses that they occupied there.

Then there was the commercial part of the city where the adventurer guild and merchant guild was positioned. This was the largest part of the city which had the highest concentration of people. It had many smaller districts that apparently had their own set of rules. Money reigned supreme there which brought the rich merchants up to the forefront.

Then there was the third side which was the one he was looking at, Reeka's port town. It was composed of many piers that were occupied by various ships. Even now he could see sailors unpacking large crates with various goods in them. While spatial technology was available in this world it was not available for every small piece of luggage.

Besides the merchant ships, there was space for a smaller residential district where the seamen and fishermen lived. This was a full-blown town within a city that could support itself by trading and fishing.

‘One of these should be going towards Albrook...’

After seeing the many various ships his hopes were up. Perhaps if he was lucky he could take a trip back this very day. Roland was worried that if he didn’t take the chance now the church could block people from leaving the city. The governing noble would probably not allow that as even a week of halting the trade would bring in losses to their coffers. Yet if the push was too strong or if the cultists appeared in the city then even the noble would have to go through with an order like that.

What he was looking at was a massive circular building that was right in the center of this port area. The water flowed inside of this large building that was taller than any of the ships that were going inside. He couldn’t really see it from this angle but from what he could tell this was a giant warehouse into which some of the ships directly deposited their wares. On the inside, there were probably a lot of guards to protect all the various wares.

‘Think that’s the harbor that was noted on the map, I need to go inside to see if there are any ships leaving.’

It was time to gather some information, with some luck he would be able to get out of here before anything drastic happened. While he wished to tour the area and check out the stores for any runic equipment he could copy, he was not a beginner anymore. Anything that was at the stores he had already seen, unless it was a high tier 2 runic item or beyond he was not really interested. Thus he descended towards the area smelling like fish in hopes of getting back home to his friends.