

Runesmith 257

Chapter 257: Youngsters.

“Sorry, it was just a slip of the tongue...”

“What do you mean, a slip of a tongue? Do you know how long those idiots from the Inquisition delayed my own research! Why would I know anything about some devilish relics?”

“...”

Roland was just sitting there without replying to the angry-looking cat face that was shouting at him through the crystal ball. It had been some months since his return from his gold rank mission. There he let it slip that it might be worthwhile to search for a certain runic mage instead of seeking help from him. At that point in time, he just did it to avoid being scrutinized but this also caused his associate to disappear for a while.

“Those idiots tried to force me to examine some damn etching of this so-called relic of theirs, those damn fools didn’t even prepare it well so much of the runic structures was lost in the process... it took me weeks to restore all of it and even then...”

The cat professor continued to vent at him while describing the process he went through. It seemed that the relic had truly been lost. The only thing that remained was a magical etching that had either been either damaged or wrongly produced by whoever the mage on the side of the inquisition was.

This magical impression could copy runic structures or off other various non-runic enchantments. If done right it could produce something akin to a detailed blueprint of the magical device. It was somewhat similar to his debugging skill but took a lot more preparation and was very delicate.

“Professor, are you sure you should be yelling out delicate information like this? What if there is a cultist spy at the Academy?..”

“A spy? Now that you mention it, there was actually one of them here but they had at least one competent inquisitor there that could see through their allegiance. Quite the handy skill he had, very troublesome he was able to see through all of my concealment magics”

‘Wait, could it have been that guy...’

Roland wanted to ask the cat if it was perhaps the same inquisitor that he had a run-in after escaping from the village but he decided against it. It would be better if people didn’t know that the old inquisitor had a relationship with the Arden estate and his father in particular. What if the kitty started asking about his origins and his secret got out in the process?

“So... were you successful in your research? Is there a way to counter that relics illusion magic?”

“Hah, even if I found something out I wouldn’t be able to tell you anything!”

“Did they force you to sign a contract?”

“A contract? No. The Inquisitors have different ways of restriction but in any case, my mouth is sealed... that is unless you wish to come over here.”

“What do you mean?”

“Hah, you can become my assistant! Aren’t you bored in that tiny village? Your talents are wasted there, ever thought about becoming a proper scholar?”

“A scholar?”

Roland was taken aback by the offer of working at the magical academy. The one the cat professor was working in was quite prestigious and had many tier 3 mages working there. Most of them followed the standard teachings but this didn’t mean that he wouldn’t be able to learn a thing or two. They probably had some superior mana-related skill books sealed away in their libraries along with special spells. These all could be converted into runic versions with the help of his own skill which made the offer quite alluring.

“That’s right, don’t you want to learn the secrets that this world holds? Discover new magic or learn the long-lost secrets of lost civilizations!”

“Um...I think I’ll have to pass on that.”

“Just imagine all that power at your fingertips... wait, you’ll pass?”

“Yeah, I still have a lot of things that I need to do here.”

The cat’s mouth was wide open as he was quickly dismissed. To the small runic magician, it was strange that someone like Roland was fine bumbling away in his forge. Yet the man in question didn’t really like the whole studying part that scholars needed to go through. If he could have the knowledge be injected into his brain instead then he would prefer that solution.

“But don’t you want to study the ancient runes? Think about the possibilities!”

“I’m more interested in their practical use, if they had been forgotten perhaps they were inefficient or lacked usefulness.”

He was not really a researcher, his preferred work was in the field. The runic machines that he created needed to help him achieve his goal which was freedom in the end. Staying cooped up in a library was not something he liked doing. Instead, he favored fiddling with the runic programming and working with his hands over going through ancient texts. Testing new theories was vastly more interesting to him than coming up with them.

“Lacked usefulness?”

The cat’s face scrunched up as if he wasn’t sure what he had heard. To a hardened researcher like him, there was no such thing as a useless magical instrument or spell. Everything was interesting and discovering these lost magical techniques was what he strived for.

“But this doesn’t mean that I’m totally against it, I just need to get through a few things here... give me a few months and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Hah, are you playing hard to get?”

After rolling his eyes the two talked for a little bit more before Roland decided to end the conversation. This confirmed that the relic was destroyed and that the church was working on decoding part of the runic code. This was not the only magical academy that they went to as what survived from the etching could be copied over.

In reality, he was interested in what that code showed and wanted to head out to help his kitty associate with the research. However, getting involved with a hot potato like that while he was this week was not smart. The cult would have probably already made moves to try and remove anyone working on this research.

Only in a place like the magic academy would he actually be safe as it had various protective spells that would probably be even effective against that illusion. Even without examining the monolith, there were spells that could counter it. The only problem was that such spells required a lot of magical energy which could only be provided in select locations. Thus for the time being he could not involve himself in this matter and could only hope that someone made a breakthrough.

'I don't think the church will make it public even if they manage to crack the code. It wouldn't be strange if they only distributed the knowledge to their most trusted paladins.'

It wouldn't be smart for the church to point out their countermeasures to their enemies. The cult might be able to quickly change their relics and patch up the loophole. Then it would be back to square one and the dance between the two religious groups would continue again.

'The cult decided to go with the nuclear option just to destroy their traces. It wouldn't be strange if they did something drastic again... but that is if they actually know of the existence of those etchings.'

Perhaps the church had learned from their mistake and they took the right steps to protect their only clue. If that scary inquisitor arrived at the magical academy then it was a sign of them taking things seriously. Roland had been able to escape the illusion twice already and was probably the best person for the job. Together with the etching and his memory of the original code that he saw through his debugging skill he might be able to decipher the mystery.

'That is, after I get to tier 3 and get a full understanding of greater runes.'

After the conversation was over he decided to pay his workshop a visit. There he continued with his work and also training. His increase in levels was not the only thing he needed to work on. All of his skills were quickly falling behind and he had to keep up. At a bare minimum, his Runic Eye of Truth needed to be maxed out before he attempted a class change again. Without it being at its highest he did not expect getting a prestige class at the rank of his Runesmith Lord.

Thus the hours ticked and the next day arrived while Roland achieved a whole four hours of sleep. This day was a bit special as some of the Orphans had turned ten within this month. Three of them were ready to receive their first class and he was going to be their sponsor.

Thanks to his work with Sister Kassia and the local church he was given a discount when buying the class change crystals. He would use it to elevate the children that he had somewhat grown accustomed to. After visiting the orphanage several times the little guys were growing on him. Money was not really a problem for him anymore and if these kids felt indebted to him, then he could actually receive a return on his investment.

“Good Morning.”

“G..good m-morning...”

“GOOD MORNIN!”

“G’ mornin’ “

The three children replied to him as he spotted them next to Elodia. The first was a somewhat shy-looking girl with green hair. She was the shortest of the bunch and her ears were a little pointy but besides that, she passed for a regular human.

Then there was the loudmouth of the group that shouted back to announce himself. The kid was the tallest of them and had a better physique. From the way, he carried himself it wouldn’t be strange if he received a class that suited his larger stature. Yet this didn’t mean that he would become a warrior as becoming a carpenter or a blacksmith was just as probable.

The last one was also a boy of ten years with some stubble around his chin. Similar to Bernir he was a half-dwarf and already at this age he was starting to grow a beard. Probably after two years, his beard would start covering most of his jaw and he could pass for a very young dwarf.

“Fin stop running around and don’t touch anything!”

“Hah, he sure looks excited.”

Elodia’s fist collided with Fin’s head as he was trying to touch one of the stationary spider golems. This was the most energetic boy from the bunch and it was the first time in Roland’s compound. The young lad had a hard time deciding what to look at, his eyes were darting in all directions as if he was in a store filled with candy.

“You already saw Fin...”

“That I did.”

“This is Marcie and this is Jorg.”

Elodia shook her head while trying to pull Fin back to the group. The girl was quite shy and the moment he glanced her way she flopped her head down to avoid his gaze. She like most of the other kids in the orphanage was mixed in one way or another. In this world purity of a bloodline was still an issue so it wasn’t strange to see an abandoned child that had parents from different races.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Wayland only looks scary on the outside but he is very kind.”

“Wait... I’m scary?”

“Awoo!”

Before anyone could answer his question Agni gave out a howl as if he wanted to agree with Elodia’s claim. Roland didn’t really pay attention to his facial expression that most of the time could make others feel uncomfortable. The only person that didn’t seem to mind his piercing gaze was Fin who was more interested in the magical items than the class crystals.

“A little bit, how about you try to smile more?”

Elodia looked down at Marcie that had jumped behind her after hearing Agni’s howling. When looking towards Roland that was told to smile she recoiled in panic at the strange facial expression that was supposed to resemble a smile.

“Like this?”

“Uh... I think we need to work on that, just act normally.”

“Ha ha, boss, stop scaring the kids!”

Bernir called out from afar while also swinging his hammer. All of them were gathered in the yard and three chairs had been prepared for the kids. After getting laughed at by his assistant the girl started relaxing but to move things along he finally decided to get things back on track.

“Have you explained everything to them?”

“Mhm but I’m not sure if everyone was listening.”

Elodia turned towards Fin who was looking at the table with three stones on them. The stones that he bought looked similar to quartz with a somewhat yellowish tint. This color was supposed to change depending on the church it was produced from. If they ventured to the moon elf territory where the religion was different then this stone would have a darker coloring to it.

“This crystal will allow you to gain your first tier 1 class. If you focus on it the effect should activate and you will be taken to a separate space. Don’t worry, you can’t be hurt there nor can you lose your life.”

This was just partially true as any trials that the kids took there could be quite painful. Yet even if they died in that space they would just return to this world as if nothing happened. Roland had the most experience with these trials but the class-up space that he produced was very unique. To explain it to these ten-year-olds he would need to relay the information that he achieved from books.

“The location you will arrive at has many names, some call it the dream space others the god realm, nevertheless it is mostly composed of your own memories and can take the form of many things.”

Just like his class tests took place in virtual reality at his old apartment something similar should happen for these children. Most of the time they found themselves in a place from their memories, this could be their own house, a library they once visited, or even a castle.

“Don’t be alarmed, try to slowly examine the place you have been taken to. There will always be a path to your destination and once there your first class will appear.”

The kids had no choice in the first class but most of the time this would give them an idea of what they could expect from life. It was a brutal system that divided the populace and mostly didn’t allow people to break out. Unless someone achieved a battle class as their first tier 1 class it would be impossible to break out of this constraint.

Yet in a way, it was rumored that what a person received was guided by their subconscious own desires. These didn’t always align with the surface goals of the people taking the trials and sometimes produced shocking outcomes that could turn a person’s life upside down in but a moment.

“Here you go, remember to sit down and concentrate, don’t worry we are all here, nothing bad is going to happen.”

Elodia reassured the trio that sat down on the previously prepared lawn chair replicas. They were folded back so that the kids could lean against the backrest in a more horizontal position. Even though they were telling the kids to not worry about it, their bodies needed to be in a safe position. After they left the magical space they would probably be confused.

‘I never really saw anyone else go through the class change before, this might be a good chance to examine the process from outside.’

His Runic Eye skill had recently reached level seven. The negative symptoms of his eye bleeding only happened if he overused the skill and not really after activating it as in the past. He was hoping to get a clue of what was happening with people during these trials and with three kids here it was the perfect setting.

Finally, the first child activated the crystal, it was Jorg the quietest of the bunch that took the plunge and the two others followed suit soon after. With haste, he activated all of his skills as well as one of his golems which was analyzing the mana patterns that the kids were giving out.

Yet only for a moment did his head start to sting, the effect of these crystals was very fast, too fast for him to wrap his head around it. For a split second, he could see some complicated runic symbols in the air but almost instantly they vanished from his sight before he could analyze them. One thing was for sure though, these structures were vastly more complicated than the ones he had previously examined.

‘Something above tier 3?’

“R... Wayland are you okay? Your nose...”

“Huh?”

While the kids were waking up from their magically induced sleep that only took two seconds in the real world, he moved his hand towards his nose. When he looked at his digits he noticed blood coming out and this was followed by a bout of lightheadedness.

“I’m fine.”

Luckily he did not collapse to the ground to make a scene. Instead, he activated a runic healing spell that he had inscribed onto a temporary bracelet he was wearing. It came equipped with a small divine crystal that made the healing spell possible.

“Sister Elodia, I did it, I have a class now!”

Shouted the small girl to take the attention away from his bloodied nose. The other two quickly followed suit and for the time being, he was safe from his girlfriend's piercing gaze. The focus was on the children and their new classes that would now shape their lives.

Chapter 258: Young Workers.

Name:

Jorg

Classes:

Stonemason L1

Name:

Fin

Classes:

Warrior L1

Name:

Marcie

Classes:

Scribe L1

There they were, the three children had managed to attain their first classes and their lives were somewhat set in stone. First was Jorg with a stonemason class that would just give him skills for building structures. It wasn't that much different than Bernir's first class that was more poised for woodwork. This was somewhat fitting for a half-dwarf and the child looked content.

Thus just like him, it would be possible to grab the blacksmith class for him if he so wished. Battle classes would be locked away to him. The only way to receive a battle class was through the first class change. After this, the person would need to meet some basic requirements. This would be mostly impossible as many of those battle classes required skills that could only be attained through unlocking such a class.

For instance, Basic One-handed Swordsmanship could be attained by anyone before they received a class. Yet to be actually able to unlock a basic sword warrior class this skill needed to change into regular One-handed Swordsmanship which could only be attained by already having a tier 1 warrior class. It seemed that the system didn't want crafting or production classes to attain battle classes.

'I guess a person could still forcefully get a skill through other ways...'

Roland looked at Jorg's status screen while knowing of at least one way of getting the young man a higher tier skill. This could be done through the thieves guild and the black market. From time to time certain blood-colored stones would be put up for sale and these contained skills lifted from people that were killed. With the help of something like that even a stonemason would be able to change their fate.

"Haha, I knew it! I told you that I would be able to get warrior!"

Fin was quite happy that he received the most basic of classes. Warriors were the most commonly obtained battle class out there but even it would allow someone to earn a lot of money by visiting dungeons. His life would probably be a lot harder than for the other two but he didn't have the same limitations.

Then there was Marcie that didn't look happy or sad. Her class brought back some old memories of being stuck in a small room and creating magical scrolls. She achieved the non-magical version of the mana scribe class. It was a bit similar to Elodia's accountant class as it gave her some basic counting skills but also would allow her to copy books and texts rather easily.

'Hm, it could be useful for keeping records around here...'

Roland was still running a small operation here, there were a lot of things going on but not enough hands to handle everything. Elodia was the only one crunching the numbers and sometimes even he had to help her out to figure out the budget for everything. It wouldn't be bad to get more people here that they could trust.

'Well that depends on the girl but she would probably not have anything against working with Elodia...'

The kids from the orphanage had quite an attachment to their big sister. Even when walking here they constantly bothered her with questions. Even now they were looking to her for affirmation about their classes, were they good or bad? They didn't really know.

"It was strange, I was stuck in a large cavern with closed doors and there was a large sword in the middle, when I picked it up a voice called out to me as I received the blessing!"

"Is that so?"

Elodia smiled at Fin that started looking for a branch to swing around. Yet he was unable as Roland along with the others working here liked to have a clean working environment. The next in line was Jorg that also explained his experience in the strange space.

"There was a large hammer next to an old building and I picked it up..."

"Just like that?"

"For me, it was a library, there was a piece of parchment and a quill... when I tried writing something I heard the voice of the goddess."

To the people in this world, the disembodied voice from the system was supposedly a gift from the gods. The voice could actually differ between people but most of the time it belonged to a woman.

"Fin I know that you are happy but you are forbidden from going to the dungeon alone, do you understand?"

"Yeah yeah..."

The boy was not listening as he was probably imagining his first monster fight. Luckily the adventurer guild wouldn't allow anyone without a card to just enter into the dungeon. The guards would keep the kids away. Yet Roland had done the same thing when he turned ten so it was still possible for Fin if he found a proper party.

"Aye Boss, can we use any of em?"

"One is a warrior, the other is a stonemason, and the third a scribe..."

"A Stonemason you say?"

Bernir appeared out of the blue after hearing some of the kids' shouts. Roland could see that Bernir was interested in Jorg which was probably due to their similar circumstances. Their lineage was the same and they also started out with builder classes which could be transformed later into a crafter.

"You want to take him under your wing? Go ahead, we could use some help around here but he won't be getting much until he proves himself as a worker."

"Haha, thanks boss, I'll be sure to knock some sense into him!"

His assistant moved toward the ten-year-old child who in this world was already an age they could join the working class. In reality, this was quite the opportunity for the young half-dwarf as he would be getting good tutelage under a tier 2 blacksmith. Then there was Marcie that could also be taken in by Elodia. With more salespeople around his shop could be open for longer which would translate into more profits.

'I probably won't be able to get all of those kids work here but not like this is their only option.'

Roland nodded at Elodia who smiled back at him. The two had already talked about the possibility of new employees. The nod was just a confirmation of him finding little Marcie's new class useful.

While she was not a runic mana scribe like him it wouldn't be impossible to use her magic scrolls. Higher tier scribes could almost copy anything that was written down, even magical books. Those would just need to be infused with mana by someone like Roland with a corresponding skill that could be purchased later.

'I feel like things might get a lot more lively here soon...'

A faint smile appeared on his face when he saw Elodia and Bernir interacting with the kids. It was as if his enterprise was slowly expanding. He could already picture some other buildings appearing in the empty plot of land that he bought but didn't use yet. Perhaps both Bernir and his new disciple could be the ones responsible for their construction. The stonemason job would also come in handy for expanding and reinforcing their underground passages.

'Finally got this out of the way, I should go back to work before Arthur decides to order more equipment...'

Thus Roland returned to his underground lair of crafting while the others tended to the orphans. For the three a new life filled with hard work and decisions was waiting. Fin in particular would be put through the wringer as working as an adventurer was not quite as splendid as people made it up to be.

...

"Are you sure it's safe?"

"Yeah, how many times do I have to repeat myself? Relax, those worms won't appear, those idiotic nobles were just stupid for coming to the dungeon before it was examined by the specialists, it serves them right. As I said, that can only happen when there is a large group of people."

"If you say so."

A group of four adventurers were walking through a rocky path with a giant chasm next to it. Some time ago a group of nobles ran into a dungeon event that produced a swarm of worms. Such things routinely appeared in some dungeons and sometimes only when some requirements were met. In this case, it would only happen if a large group of tier 2 class holders would try to go through this path. If the groups were small and kept a distance from each other then nothing would trigger the event.

“Now be quiet, even if those worms won’t appear other monsters could, stay sharp and focus.”

“Aye aye.”

It was a regular party with a common composition, three warriors, and one archer that was there to help discover monster ambushes or ranged support. It was a common occurrence to not find mages or healers in parties like this as warrior variants made up the bulk of the adventurers.

“Hm...”

“Is something wrong?”

Called out the leader that was a tier 2 sword warrior. The archer looked around but shook his head.

“It’s just... too quiet...wait, what was that?”

At first, the archer wasn’t sure what was going on, most of the time he was able to discover nearby monsters or at least hear things from a distance. Yet after going through this winding mountain-like pathway it had gotten really quiet.

“I didn’t hear anything... could it just have been some fallen rocks?”

The group of three warriors peeked to all sides and even up but couldn’t find anything out of place. There were no corners that a monster could be lurking from which only left the dark chasm as the perpetrator. Their best guess was that a lone slug monster or worm was scaling the wall which was a rare occurrence but not impossible.

“Do you see anything?”

“I think there is something there but...I can’t really make it out...”

The archer attempted to activate various tracking skills but they were all unsuccessful in detecting anything.

“Couldn’t it be just some monster that is outside your skill range? Not like it will pose a problem to us, let’s move on.”

The leader called out to the man with the bow that wasn’t quite sure what was wrong. Yet as he was leaning away from the chasm he noticed something. It was a peculiar sight of two green orbs of flames right before his face. There it was the perpetrator he was looking for and the monster was literally standing before him.

“What the?”

“How did that thing!”

The party members jumped back as from within the chasm a skeletal body appeared. This monster at first looked like an illusion but within a moment its entire body was before everyone. However it was already too late, the monster's green flames erupted into all directions and collided with the defenseless tier 2 adventurers.

...

It was a peculiar thing to behold. The tier 3 Lich that had escaped from its prison looked at the flaming adventurers that couldn't resist a simple soul-flame spell. They were far more delicate than the monster expected, if it knew that its opponents were this weak it would have gone out of the mineral-filled area a lot sooner.

The Lich took its time, it examined the strange creatures that inhabited this new area. It used its magic to figure out the structure of this place and came to a few conclusions. First of all, this place was very similar to the one that it came from. The monsters it encountered after being killed appeared in the same places and destroyed walls were slowly mending themselves.

This made the Lich a bit moody as it was afraid that it was just in another extension of its previous prison. Yet there was something new, a different kind of being that resided in this place that wasn't constricted by its rules. They were quite fascinating as they could move independently and even communicate with each other.

It had used its extensive mana sense to eavesdrop on the people that were passing from above. There was some kind of trail that was rarely used but from time to time a group of three to five of those beings would appear. They were quite interesting to behold and even had an interesting way to communicate through various sound waves. Now that it was looking at some of them it could even identify the sound-producing organ.

"N-no... s-stay away."

"..."

"nOoO... SsTTaaYY 'wAYyy..."

One of these creatures was now being held in its skeletal hand. Even now it was producing strange sounds through this organ. The Lich was not sure what it was saying as it was unable to process this language. The words the voice said were different, they were something that communicated directly to its very core. The only thing it could do was replicate the sound pattern with the help of mana.

The Archer that was being held by the monster utilized his whole body but even when his fists landed on the bony creature only he received injuries. The Lich came to the conclusion that this fleshy being was another enemy. For some reason, it was having a tough time controlling its urge to kill. It was not the voice but something more primal there that was pushing it towards this decision.

Yet it was able to hold itself back, it needed more information. This thing was not like the other monsters that the Lich was more similar to. It possessed another different mana pattern that was really weak but similar to the creatures that it had already killed. This mana signature was a lot more akin to the one that that large blue beam of energy produces.

"AGHhhh..."

Within a few moments, the man's head exploded as the Lich constricted its bony fingers around it. This was not it, this thing was similar but still closer to the dungeon's mana pattern and to what this world was composed of. It desired to interact with the mana that allowed it to break its shackles. There was something very unique about that energy pattern and it would not stop until it came to the bottom of this mystery.

While it wanted to do nothing more and learn about the truth it didn't have any clues on where that mana fingerprint had originated from. In the mine area, it found no clues, and the traces of what it was looking for had been deluded by the dungeon's own mana. It needed more information and also a better grasp of where it was.

Thud

The body of the adventurer dropped down to the ground after his demise. Yet this was not the end for him or for the others. The Lich had other plans for these fleshy beings as there were certain spells that it could use on these remains. It had never performed the spell but it had it ingrained into its very being. There were no words, just a motion of its bony hand. The charred remains as well as the one missing its head started being surrounded by dark green mist. This mist seeped into them and within a few seconds, a reaction could be seen. The rattling of bones was followed by the shedding of any remaining flesh.

Blazing Skeleton Warrior L 56

From the remains of the warriors, three reflections of them made from crimson bones were created. The weapons that their living counterparts didn't need anymore now belonged to them.

Blazing Skeleton Archer L 55

The last one was the archer that had reformed its skeletal head in strange ways. The shattered bones had mended themselves to reform the entire skeletal structure. However their creator was not pleased, the levels of the fleshy being before they died were higher. It observed around a fifteen percent decrease in levels as also in all-around stats.

This feeling of displeasure didn't last for long as it looked towards the distance. There it could feel another small group of similar creatures approaching it. Even though the raised monsters it could produce were weaker there was always strength in numbers. The Lich held up its staff while slowly concealing itself and its new minions. When the next group of meat bags arrived it would be ready again...