

Runesmith 327

Chapter 327: Knighting Oneself?

"T-the Lieutenant... h-he killed him..."

"What should we do?"

The group of armored knights looked at the embedded head in the tree next to them. Just a moment ago their leader's head went flying into it after getting punched. They could not process this feat as no one had expected this much resistance coming from this place. Their spy network had never failed them before and had been ill-informed about this man's power. It was becoming clear to them that he was not just a simple tier 2 runesmith but something else entirely.

"Hold your ground, we are Knights of the Valerian household! As long as we have the Knight Commander with us, we will be victorious! We must not waver as our cause is just"

One of the older knights stepped forward to take over the situation. It seemed that he was next in line and now had become their leader. Yet just as he was shouting at the remaining men here, his body was yanked forward. It flew at the man that had killed their Lieutenant with one strike to the head.

"You guys really like to prattle on, do you actually think that you are the ones in the right?"

"U-unhand me, do you understand the gravity of the situation? We represent the Valerian Household, your deeds will not go unpunished!"

"My deeds? Do you even realize what you did?"

The man was floating up in the air while being held up by something that looked like a blue haze. These knights did not have the mana sense to see the spell used, the only one that was able to grasp the whole situation was the mage in the back. Even while the other knights were getting pumped up to give it another try against their opponent, he didn't want to do anything but run.

His mana sense allowed him to see the difference in power. No one could really see the true magnitude of the man before them but he could somewhat compare it to other mages or monsters. It was apparent that this person was a tier 3 class holder and not someone that had just reached that point. Their mana was just too massive and comparable to mages well over level two hundred.

This was something he could measure by the simple mage hand spell the man was using. The spell was something even a level one mage was capable of casting. It wasn't really a spell used for combat as it was usually sluggish and the focus was more on precise hand movements than speed or power.

He vividly remembered how this mage's hand grabbed their Lieutenant who was someone close to reaching level hundred fifty. The man was close to reaching his own class change yet in a matter of seconds his head was flying from his body. This was not someone that they could face on their own, only their commander could do anything. The mage was certain that there had been some type of deception afoot.

It was hard to believe that their spies would make such a blunder. If they knew that a tier 3 class holder was holding out here, then their commander would be here to meet him instead. In the mage's eyes,

this person was probably hiding their real status through magical means for years. They had attacked such a person without any knowledge and there was probably only one way of getting out of this alive.

The man before them was still only a commoner, just on the level of a platinum adventurer. Thanks to his class being related to a mage, the man here knew that their intelligence and reasoning should be above average. If he could just point out the downsides of the acts he was performing, the situation could be saved. He needed to act fast though, the second in command was about to get himself choked to death by the mage's hand spell and the other knights would do a disservice to themselves if they attempted to save him by forceful means.

“Please wait! Stop!”

“You want me to wait? I’m not the one that started this.”

“Yes, please think about the repercussions of your actions, do you truly wish to make enemies of the Valerian household? If you kill all of us here, you will be branded as a criminal!”

“A criminal huh?”

The mage nodded as he could see the man’s resolve wavering. It was impossible to go against the nobles and this problem was magnified when a Duke was involved. There was no way that this man here wouldn’t know the consequences. It was hard to see his facial expression as it was buried under a hood but his words seemed to have calmed the situation down. Now they just needed to retreat and their commander would make short work of this man for them.

“You make a good point but let me ask you a question then.”

“Ah, yes?”

“What’s the punishment for destroying a knight’s property and attacking his family members on the said property?”

“Huh? A knight’s? That would be... y-you don’t mean?”

“Yes, that’s right, my actions have been justified from the start...”

...

Roland remained silent for a moment while thinking. Only now did he have some time to cool off after almost losing Agni. The man that was responsible was already dead but these people that were here were not devoid of any responsibility. They all had participated in the attack and did not blink twice before following his orders.

While he knew that these people weren’t entirely at fault. After going through the tier 3 trial he became aware of the layers of indoctrination needed to build up a reasonable army. It started at the knight academy and following orders had been drilled into their very core.

‘This mage is right, I’ve already become a criminal by killing that guy. It won’t even matter if I try to explain myself.’

Before he could choke the other knight to death with his mage hand spell the other person started talking. After killing the first person his rage had gone down slightly and was steadily decreasing during the conversation. While he had become stronger, this strength would do him no good against a noble household.

There were a few options that he could go with, one of them was murdering everyone here and then making a run for it. Escaping into another country was feasible if he was able to gain access to a ship and get off this island. It might have even been possible for him to take all the blame which would save both Elodia and Bernir from being taken in. Roland at least felt somewhat confident in his own skills for such a plan to work. There was even that woman that he had connections with that would probably smuggle him out of here.

This was one option but there were others, one of them would keep him here while giving validity to his acts. There was another way of getting out of this mess alive without any need of moving away from Albrook. However, if he decided to take this path he would be constraining his own life considerably.

Treading it would put him out into the public eye a lot more than now. It could potentially also alert his father to his presence. That is if he actually revealed his true noble name which wasn't truly necessary for this to work. A decision needed to be made and it had to be now. There was no time to think everything over anymore. This was something that he managed to avoid for more than ten years of escaping from his old home.

Yet if he didn't make this decision then his life in this place would probably be over. Knights from the side of the duke's son would probably come for him. There was no such thing as a justifiable cause for a commoner to kill a knight, even less if this knight was related to a prominent noble house. The Valerians were known for not tolerating any pushback from their citizens and Arthur would not be able to save him from this.

There was just one possible route that he could take without giving out his last name to these people. This route would bind him to Arthur's fate at least until a proper heir for their Duke house was named. It would give him a reason for killing this Lieutenant though and also allow him to stay in this place where he built up his life.

Perhaps if it was the old Roland from before he would have been inclined to take the easier route out. Running away had always allowed him to survive and building up a new base of operations with his current skills wouldn't be that hard. Perhaps after things had calmed down a bit, he would even be able to revisit this place again.

No, this was not the way for him anymore. After spending over a year battling with wooden men he realized that sometimes the best defense was a strong offense. If he didn't take things into his own hands here then he would lose everything that he already built up.

He was tired of constantly being taken advantage of by people he did not respect. If he didn't put his foot down here then nothing would ever change. At another time a similar situation would arise and perhaps then he would not be there to save his friends and loved ones. It was important to show people that they could not take advantage of him anymore. For this reason, he needed to make an example of someone, someone like Knight Commander Emmerson.

It was still possible for him to talk it through with that man and make him leave. This was not the issue, the real problem would come from what happened next. Without showing that he couldn't be messed with, there probably wouldn't be much of a change. It wouldn't even be strange if another group from one of the Valerian son's sides appeared a week later. To keep this place secure he needed to not only be a shield but also a sword.

"W-we didn't know, please be reasonable we all belong on the same side."

"What does he mean?"

The mage realized it sooner before anyone else here did. It was an easy conclusion he came to after exchanging a few words. There was only one way Roland had an excuse for killing the Lieutenant and that was if he was either a noble or a knight. While revealing his actual name was still a possibility he decided to go with a different approach.

It was a known fact that Alexander Valerian was forcing his sons to compete for the title. Each of them was given land to manage through which they were meant to show their skills. Even someone like Arthur that was not seen as a proper candidate still adhered to the same rules.

Roland's ticket out of this mess was one edict in particular. The heir candidates were able to appoint knights for themselves. Usually, this act was carried out by proper nobles but a Duke household was at the apex and had some wiggle room. The father allowed his sons to appoint a head knight that didn't even need to be from a line of nobility or from an academy.

Each of the brothers had already appointed such a person many years ago, they were even given strong men to fill that role eventually. Arthur on the other hand was unable to appoint such a person as they needed to be a tier 3 class holder to even qualify. There was also no one really willing to take the spot as they could be pitted against other knights and lose their lives.

Roland's relationship with Arthur was mostly neutral. From his standpoint, giving up ownership of this city was not a big deal. His life wouldn't have been affected by a leadership change, he would just have to make gear for a different person. Now on the other hand, one of those potential bosses pointed a blade at his family, this was not something that he could look past anymore.

"He means that you should probably run and tell your commander that I'll see him soon..."

The man in his grasp who previously was trying to intimidate him with his status found himself with a crooked neck. His body was tossed to the side while a spell headed his way. The mage that was trying to reason with him a second ago was already turning around to run. It was clear that this man knew what was going on and had no loyalty to the knights here.

His body was becoming enhanced with various spell effects to probably make his escape faster but not as Roland cared for this. His aim was not really to eradicate everyone here, it was actually better if some of these men survived the scuffle. He needed rumors of his ruthlessness to spread so that everyone would think twice before doing something like this ever again.

Everyone quickly realized that they would be unable to reason through this situation. Roland also saw that some of the knights were still quite young, one, in particular, was barely above level sixty and

probably a new recruit fresh from the academy. Yet only fate would decide who survived as he formed many spheres of light in front of his body through the runes in his armor.

These balls of mana flew forward in all directions while being aimed at the group of now fleeing soldiers. Some of them embedded themselves in the men's bodies while others just grazed their limbs or armor pieces. Having to listen to grown men cry out in pain didn't bring him any joy but a message needed to be sent.

'A few of them made it out alive...'

Thanks to the sensors and lack of mana-dispersing powder he could tell that five people had survived. While he could have easily chased them down to deliver the finishing blow this was enough. What he needed to focus on was the part after, Emmerson.

"This certainly won't do..."

After raising his arm up he saw his gauntlet turning to dust. The number of skills and mana he used had burned through the runic traces. The metal was unable to tolerate his newfound power and had begun to disintegrate. Only thanks to constant uses of his skills to mend the runes was it even able to last this much.

Luckily the piece of armor he was wearing was a backup version that he used for black market business. He did not want people to recognize the usual armor designs that he wore. However, this didn't mean that his better suit wouldn't suffer the same fate.

"W-what are we going to do... should we leave the city? But what about the children, I can't just..."

"It's fine, just stay here and I'll take care of everything."

"What do you mean? How can you just kill knights, I don't understand."

Elodia had managed to cool her head down and also realized that Roland was in a lot of trouble. She clearly didn't see a way out of this besides running.

"Have you forgotten who I really am?"

"Who you really are?"

It took a moment for her to realize what he was alluding to but this didn't fully remove her worries. Even though she knew that Roland was an actual noble hiding from something, it wouldn't be that easy.

"Are you sure? You've been hiding for such a long time, are there no other options... I'm sorry this is all because of me."

"It's not your fault and there are more important things to worry about now, those knights had no right to be here and my actions were justified, the only problem that remains now is..."

"The only remaining problem now?"

"... Hey..."

"Huh?"

While Roland and Elodia were talking about the whole situation they heard a voice coming from above them. It belonged to the third person involved in this mess, Bernir.

“Could you help me out here Boss, these magic vines are really tight.”

The man had become entangled by the mage that fled and then remained bound for that spot for the entirety of the fight. With some help from Roland’s magic abilities, the vines came undone.

“Those knights really pulled a fast one on me... but how is Agni? Did he?”

“He is fine, I’ll have to ask you to protect him until I’m back, he probably won’t wake up for a few hours.”

“Protect him? That’s fine, but what are you going to do Boss?”

“That’s what I want to know.”

“Nothing much, I’m just going to have a duel.”

“A duel?”

Both Elodia and Bernir looked at each other without really knowing what was going on. They didn’t really follow the conversation and had no idea that Roland had just decided to become Arthur’s head knight. This all without the noble even knowing what had transpired here.

Chapter 328: Throwing Weight Around.

‘I gave a nice speech but now I need to actually do it...’

Not much time had passed since the knights invaded his home. First, it was thieves or bandits, then it was a murderous Lich and finally, he upgraded to the scariest of enemies, the nobles. All of them chose to attack his home where he just wanted to be left alone. If it wasn’t for all those people then he would have no use pursuing power.

Roland never really was the adventurous type nor did he want fame or glory. Having a place to call home with a small number of friends was what he was pursuing. He never understood people that pushed for multiple friendships or relationships with many partners. To him there was something lost during such a pursuit, there was also no time in the day to foster that many bonds.

This was why his anger was reaching the zenith. Almost everyone from his limited friend group had been attacked by the armored men. Their leader was still in the city and probably at Arthur’s estate forcing him to sign over the rights to the dungeon. This was something that he had already expected and had prepared for. However, he had not expected something like an attack on his home to transpire.

What should have happened was a transfer of ownership to another brother with Arthur remaining a figurehead. His life was not supposed to change much and while this was happening he would use this time to really build himself up. The armor that he was putting on was still the old model as he had no time to innovate. His ascension to tier 3 had been short-lived as not even a week had passed since that day.

‘It probably won’t be as easy as with those tier 2 knights...’

After the whole predicament with Agni was over he had taken out his rage on the remaining knights. Some of them had made it out alive and he had no intention of chasing them down. They were left alive for a reason, to send a message to their leader about what they did. If he eradicated them with no survivors then the other party could claim that it was without just cause. He wanted to have people see them running through the streets to Arthur's estate while he got mentally prepared for what he was about to do.

'I don't know Emmerson well enough to form a strategy but I don't think he will run from the duel.'

Roland had made up his mind of becoming a head knight. The only real requirement was to be at an advanced level past the tier 3 ascension trial. There were no class limitations in becoming a noble's Knight, even a battle mage could do it if the noble gave them the title.

'I don't think Arthur will refuse either...'

This was all of course a scam. He did not get knighted nor did he swear his fealty to the young noble. Luckily such things weren't forced on paper so if Arthur followed his lead, everything would work out. It was the only part of his plan that was really shaky as it was possible for Arthur to reject his proposal. If such a thing occurred then he would need to go ahead with his backup plan and reveal his last name. By being a son of a Baron he had similar rights to his own possessions and still had a justifiable cause for killing the men.

'They could have waited a few weeks...'

After setting his helmet onto his head he looked to the side. There he saw a small coin-sized piece of metal. It was quite shiny and looked to be made from a crimson substance. It was a piece of red mythrill that he had processed from the ores he took from the dungeon. This would be the basis for his new armor in the future but making it wasn't easy. Without his new Forgefire Control skill it would have burned a hole in his current smelter.

Fitting runes into the metal wasn't easy either and required a lot of force. Then there was the problem of developing a whole new runic system of spells. He needed to base everything on tier 3 rune designs that he wasn't totally an expert in. There were so many new spells and effects that he needed to practice with. Having a few months for all the trials would have been truly a blessing.

Now on the other hand he needed to quickly get rid of Emmerson and start preparing. This was probably only the start of it all, even after this knight commander was gone others would quickly show up. What he needed to do now, was to show that he couldn't be easily defeated.

'I can't let anyone think that I'm an easy target or there will never be an end to it. They say that first impressions matter the most for a reason...'

Finally, he grasped a shield from the side along with his hammer staff. None of the golems would be joining him in this fight as they needed to guard his home once more. With the help of his skill, he managed to restore them to a functional state but they lost a quarter of their original fighting potential. The skills to repair everything through magic weren't perfect and with too many uses all of his runic products would eventually break down.

"Are you really going to fight their commander?"

“Yes.”

After marching out of his underground workshop he encountered Elodia. She was tending to the sleeping Agni that had not woken up. The procedure he went through where he was blasted with divine energy and then electricity wasn't something normal. Roland didn't really know how long he would remain like this but the more he looked at him, the more angered he became.

“Is there really no other way? What if something happens to you? That commander can't be weak and you've just advanced...”

“Perhaps there is... perhaps he'd even apologize to me and give me some gold as an apology... but sometimes there are actions that are inexcusable.”

“I see that you have made up your mind already but... why are you wearing that?”

“Oh, you mean this? Well, I'm playing the role of a Valerian Knight so I needed to look like one...”

Roland had taken one of the Valerian banners that he had stashed away in his workshop and attached it to his neck. It didn't look too great as he didn't have enough time to figure out the right dimension or the correct way to attach it to his armor. Luckily Elodia was here and noticed that it wasn't really positioned well.

“Give me a moment, you can't really show yourself to the public like this.”

Elodia took out her sewing kit and got to work. The cape just needed a few attachments and with some helpful skills, it wouldn't take her long for the task to be complete. The Valerian house was represented by a standing stag with a crown on its head. The material had a crimson tint to it and somewhat went well with the darkened silvery armor that he was wearing. After a few minutes, the cape stopped looking out of place and he finally fit the image of a gallant knight.

“Take care.”

“I will.”

For a moment the two remained inside the house with Elodia's hands hugging him from behind. They didn't exchange many words and finally, he made his way out of his home. There he encountered his trusted assistant, in his hand, he could see a runic weapon that he had previously utilized to injure one of the knights.

“Give 'em hell boss and don't worry, they'll be safe with me.”

“I will.”

He nodded at Bernir while heading towards the reinforced gate. When outside he looked at the store that was missing glass in the windows and had a lot of melted weaponry inside. Some time had passed since the incident but he was having a hard time remaining calm. On the outside, it didn't seem like much had changed but on the inside, he was ready to snap.

The knights that had attacked his home had around twenty minutes headstart but this didn't mean much. With his current body, it wouldn't take much to catch up to them. His foot moved forward as he started walking into the forest. His steps started getting faster and faster until he was already running.

Even though he was wearing full plate armor and had a cape fluttering behind him, the speed was tremendous.

“Huh? W-what is it?”

With large strides, he arrived at the fork in the road that on one side took him to the city and on the other to the dungeon. His descent from the forest was drastic as he scared some adventurers by heavily landing on the ground with both his feet. Normally the stares he would get were ones of curiosity yet today they were of fright. The moment the people here noticed the crest on his new cape, they dropped their heads down immediately.

In his current getup, he didn't look much different than the group that arrived at the city. Rumors of them howling people over to the Valerian estate were probably already in circulation. After a silent moment, he resumed his charge towards the city gates at which he noticed the usual guards but today, they were not alone. With them, there also were a few new faces that belonged to his now enemies.

“Halt!”

To no surprise, the gate guards here had already capitulated to the group of knights. The two of them were throwing their weight around without giving any space for the old guards to speak up. Roland wasn't sure why they were acting like this, their friends that he dispatched had probably already passed through this path. Perhaps they were in such a hurry that they didn't explain the situation to these two who were now blocking his way.

“Move out of my way.”

“Who do you think you are?”

“A mere knight like you doesn't have the right to know.”

Knights were not nobles but just like in the latter a pecking order existed. It started with a regular Knight and right after was a Knight Lieutenant. Then it was followed by a Knight Captain and finally a Knight Commander. While there were many knight orders within this kingdom and each noble had their own group, there were some ranks that sustained their worth outside their own orders.

These were Knight Commanders that needed a tier 3 rank for their rank to come into effect. This would also be the rank that he would be given as Arthur's head Knight. The men that he was interacting with were far below his level and would normally have to bow before him. In the case that they weren't, he had justifiable cause to punish them for it,

Thus while moving forward he reached out with his hand in the direction of the knight that spoke out. He treated him the same as the Lieutenant, with a simple spell the man was flying through the air and drawn over to his hand. After arriving before him the man was grasped by the neck and lifted up for everyone to see.

Roland made sure that everyone that was gathered here to see his actions. It was something that he actually wanted to spread as rumors throughout the city. With a little wind spell, he also made sure that his cape was fluttering and showing off that Valerian emblem to everyone.

“You dare stand in the way of me? A Knight Commander from the Valerian house?”

“A...a Knight Commander? T-that’s preposterous, we would have been informed about s-such a person if he existe....”

“Silence.”

The man was instantly thrown to the side like a doll made of straw. The amount of power that Roland was in possession of was truly tremendous. This knight with all of his heavy armor tumbled around for a good ten meters before colliding with the wall to the side. This tier 2 man was unable to make any sense of the situation as he passed out from the collision. He was still alive but some of his bones were fractured in a few places from the drastic toss to the side.

“Y-you dare attack the Valerian Knights?”

“Do you have a problem with your hearing, soldier? Move to the side while I’m feeling merciful.”

This was the main gate and entrance to the whole city. On the side, there were many carriages with merchants and adventurers that were watching this strange scene playing out. They all could see the fluttering cape and stag that represented the Valerian household. The same emblem was fluttering above them on one of the flags which to them meant that it was some strange internal issue between knight orders.

“What are you waiting for?”

“But he said...”

“He must be lying why would a Commander from the Valerian order be here?”

The knight that remained at the entrance gate was almost foaming at his mouth. The soldiers that were here were composed of people from the city. It seemed that all the other knights from Theodore’s side were busy somewhere else. He could do nothing more than to rely on the manpower that was given to him but it wasn’t working. Even less after Roland activated the skill that he learned during his tier 3 trial.

“I said, MOVE!”

The armor that he was wearing started glowing and showing off various runes that were inscribed onto the metal. A suppressive wave of energy washed over the entire area causing people's knees to buckle. It was his Runic Suppression skill that informed everyone about his tier 3 status. No one that was gathered here could resist the pressure that was coming from his armored form and soon the situation shifted.

“W-welcome Sir. Knight Commander!!”

“M-make way for the Commander!”

Some of the guards had probably figured out who was under the armor but they could not be sure. Sometimes rumors about Roland being something more than a runesmith circulated throughout the city. After the Lich was defeated some even believed that he had killed it himself. With this information and the knight covered in runes, they could only move. It did look like this man belonged to the Valerian household so there was nothing that they could do.

No one could say anything, they just watched him strut through the area with everyone moving to the sides. It was a strange feeling for Roland, it was as if he had finally gained the recognition that he was owed. Perhaps some people would be ecstatic to be given this treatment but he wasn't. Putting himself in the spotlight wasn't something that he enjoyed after this day was over he would probably need to get used to this type of treatment.

"I-is he gone?"

"W-who was that? I thought I'd suffocate..."

"Is that what a tier 3 person feels like?"

"I thought I would die..."

"Could that have been Wayland the Runesmith? The armor looked familiar."

"The Runesmith? You must be joking, I'm sure that the Runesmith probably just made that armor."

Only after Roland had left the entrance gate and vanished behind the corner did the people gathered there dare to speak out. They were all suppressed by his new skill that didn't discriminate between individuals. Even some high-level adventurers that were mixed into the crowd could not keep from sweating. Some of them were already running towards the adventurer guild to tell the news of the maddened knight that was stomping towards the Valerian villa.

Their conversations didn't really go unnoticed as all of Roland's senses were enhanced after achieving his new class. This included his hearing through which he could hear them talking from afar. He could only increase his pace while the people continued to speculate about his arrival. Soon enough his goal became clear as he was storming for Arthur's estate where all of the other Knights were gathering.

'Just as I expected, they won't just let me through that easily but it doesn't matter...'

"Hey what are you..."

"S-stop him..."

"H-how?"

When going through the main gate he encountered some of the proper Valerian knights. Some stood in his way and were even able to somewhat resist his suppressive skill. Even when they did there was no way to stop him. Even simple mana spells were enough to send them flying to the sides. All arrows, ranged attacks and magical bombs that they came equipped with could not get past his shield.

"Get out of my way."

Finally he was there at Arthur's Villa but he did not see the owner anywhere. It seemed that he was either inside of his home or somewhere keeping Emmerson busy. He was aware of some of his schemes but it didn't seem that any of the platinum adventurers that he previously met had arrived. There were no other tier 3 class holders in the vicinity, only one fit the bill and was also showing up on his map.

"Knight Commander Emmerson, you're the leader of these knights right? Come out, unless you're too scared to face me in a proper duel."

He shouted loudly while enhancing his voice with a runic spell. The large dot that represented his enemy was quick to react to his taunts. He wasn't alone though, a lot of the armored men he arrived with were also here. They were quick to come out from the sides to encircle his location and probably waited for their leader to give them the order to attack. Even if it was Roland, he wasn't sure if he could take this large group of people alone.

'So that's him? He looks big... might be a strength type... or a defensive one.'

Finally, he saw the man who he would be facing. He exuded a certain aura and carried himself to fit the image of a Knight Commander. The armor that he was wearing looked bulkier than the one Roland came equipped with. The sword on his right side was also quite thick and the shield on the left would not be easily broken.

However, this did not stop Roland from taking a few steps forward, this man had to go down. The way he carried himself spoke more than words. It was certain that this man had gone through his share of hardships and managed to come out on top. It didn't seem that he was that rattled by this forced encounter or the duel either. Roland didn't show any fear either, instead, he activated his analyzing skill to see if perhaps he could gain some data about his new opponent.

'Level Two hundred fifteen, This might not be as easy as I assumed.'