

Runesmith 343

Chapter 343: Time For Power Leveling.

“Woof!”

A rather excited-looking ruby wolf charged at an unsuspecting salamander. Before the creature could even turn around its head was between a set of sharp teeth. A crunching sound was heard by the nearby people that didn't even really pay that much attention to the low-level creature being slaughtered.

“We are already in the lower section of the dungeon? How long have you known about these tunnels?”

“That's a trade secret. Agni, be sure to take out these monsters when you see them.”

“Awoo!”

“He sure is enjoying this.”

“Yeah, he hasn't been here in a while and he loves eating the mana stones.”

“Mana stones?”

Asked Lobelia while wondering if she should pull out her bow or not. Agni was running around and defeating all of the monsters around here which left nothing for them to do. In her mind, this was a strange tactic for them to level up. However, after Roland presented them with the plan she could see how using these low-tier 2 monsters as experience was inefficient.

“Yes, he has an interesting diet but we should move on, we are already drawing in too much attention.”

“That's probably because of your armor.”

“Hm...”

Roland frowned under his helmet while grumbling. The larger armor composed of shiny mithril was truly a sight to behold. The design was a bit more intricate than what he usually went with. If it was the old him then he would have probably looked like a trash can with arms. Instead, he looked fashionable and knightly to fit in better for his new role in the city. He considered putting on a robe over it but it would just melt instantly if he produced any type of attacking spell.

‘This place is too well-lit for its own good, we should move along.’

The sword that he made to float was just strapped to his back. Even without it, the armor was eye-catching enough but at least it blended in well with the red glow of the lava pits. The runic traces and runes weren't as visible as on his older creation. With the added thickness and increase in the quality of metal, they didn't show through unless he actually activated their effects. Only then would his enemies know that he was wearing enchanted gear but then it would already be too late.

‘A large sword... I wish that emulating swordsmanship skills would be possible for me.’

Roland had trained a little bit with swords when he was younger. Throughout the years he had to give up on increasing them as there were just not enough hours in the day for everything. Focusing on rune

smithing had allowed him to come this far and was the right choice. It was possible for him to learn some advanced combat skills now but leveling them up was the true problem.

After interacting with Emmerson and the other Knight Commander that left the other day, he wasn't sure if he needed to go outside of his current comfort zone. While the man he faced in the duel had some nice defensive skills, they weren't really different from what he was able to produce with mana. The only drawback was when going against anti-magic but other energy sources like aura had similar deficiencies.

Without his runic eyes working on skills, he could not copy them as he did with the divine spells. It seemed that there was a difference somewhere that perhaps couldn't be covered by wavelengths. Yet, after seeing some of those skills he could see how he could integrate them into his own system.

'Skills seem similar to something like automatic combat, the person performing them is limited to the motion decided before their activation.'

"Hey, one got through!"

"..."

While walking towards the lava lake they encountered a few other monsters. One of the fire salamanders popped out of a nearby pool while he was passing by. This was nothing out of the ordinary as the monster's speed was far below something a tier 3 class holder was capable of.

His hand moved to the side and he spread his digits as if waiting for something. This was the cue for the large sword on his back to fly out. With the help of the mage's hand skill, it was quickly propelled into his grasp. After getting a good grip he thrust this weapon forward while activating one of the basic skills that he had learned.

Instantly his sword was guided forward and his body performed the motion perfectly. Just like Knight Commander Alphonse, he did the same. The blade connected with the monster's head and produced a massive hole in it. This skill was just one of the basic ones every swordsman or even warrior was capable of, called the 'Sword Thurst'. Through its use, Roland was aware of the skill effects and of their one major downside.

'The parts of the body that are required to perform the skill are locked into the motion for a moment. This usually won't be a problem but can still leave a person open to a quick counter.'

Roland's mind was indeed made up about the usage of skills. On one hand, they allowed people to perform actions automatically while going above the limits of their bodies. Higher-level skill users could later engage in high-speed combat with skills helping them evade and counter. While they were quite the boost to one's strength they could also become a double-edged sword. He could see someone becoming too reliant on this auto-combat-like feature.

'It would probably be best to have a good balance between passive and active skills instead.'

He was not really someone that used a lot of active skills but he could see a battle between higher-level skill users to be something similar to a chess match. They would need to decide when the best point was to activate their attacking or defensive skills. Seeking opportunities for an opening or luring in others with a fake one, was part of the course.

Yet for someone like him that went with the magical route, he would need to traverse his own path. Combat with fast-casting runes was not something prevalent in this world. Roland might have been the only person alive with a unique skill setup for magical equipment casting. While rune mages existed, they were not capable of creating something like a suit of armor, nor did they have the strength and endurance to use it in battle. There was no blueprint for him, nor would he ever find a master to guide him to his answer. What he could do was just continue practicing, make mistakes, and learn through experience.

“We are lucky, the lava pool is clearing out.”

“Yeah but we are not alone, isn’t that a platinum adventurer?”

“You’re right but the rest look like golden adventurers. Did they hire the person to guide them into the new area?”

Lobelia responded to Armand after the group arrived at the large pool of lava that was about to clear up. Now that Roland’s secret was out in the open, everyone else was eager to visit the new dangerous area. Even on the way here, they saw some strong-looking parties venturing through.

“We need to run you two, ignore their group.”

He voiced his opinion while storming off for the entrance. Agni was right behind, his tongue flopping around as he was quite enjoying the freedom to run through the dungeon. Soon everyone waiting for the lava to clear was sprinting into the middle.

‘I’ll have to bring this up with Arthur, this can’t continue to be the only way of getting to the dungeon.’

Getting to the new dungeon could set people back by days. It would probably now be faster as the monsters would have been cleared out, yet this couldn’t go on. The longer they or any other adventurer needed to get there, the more money they would lose. Thus there were two options, either build some type of elevator at the chasm area or a bridge through this lava pool.

The molten rocks at the center spot were somewhat shallow. Creating a small barricade around it might have been possible. Now that there was a reason to invest in this venture they needed to hasten this process. It was well worth it to spend copious amounts of money on getting those tier-3 materials out into the city. They would stimulate the economy and allow everyone to profit like they never profited before.

After arriving at the middle Roland activated the secret area. The other adventures that were coming with them were probably equipped with one of the keys that he made. It was just a small plate of metal that looked like a credit card. With its help, people could open up this area to gain access.

‘It’s quite the scam though, the charges are limited and you have to pay at the adventurers guild to get more.’

Getting to resources wasn’t free and anyone that wanted to get further in had to pay up. The card also allowed the city to profit from an adventurer that didn’t make it back or decided to sell their materials elsewhere. Thanks to this method it allowed Arthur to gain a little bit of extra money without having to do anything. Even though Roland’s cards could probably be copied by others, some money would flow back into their pockets.

While remaining silent the fifth member of their group was first to make her way down into the chamber. Mary seemed slightly on edge while traversing through the dungeon. The young woman didn't seem to be too trusting and perhaps was constantly looking for an escape route. Going in first would allow her to check for traps and other elements while getting away.

"Hey, cute maid, why are you so silent?"

"I just don't want to talk to you, we should remain cautious of our surroundings."

"We don't really have to be with those two around, just relax and have a nice chat."

"Hey, leave her alone."

"What? I'm not doing anything?"

Lobelia interrupted Armand's exchange with Mary, who didn't seem too interested in her new adventuring companion. The man continued to send her lustful gazes throughout the entire trip and continued to throw one-liners in her direction. Luckily their trip had continued without much of a problem and Armand was able to keep it inside of his pants.

'I hope these two won't get in a fight while I'm gone...'

The path forward was clear, the corridors that were usually filled with monsters were barren. Many other adventurers had already gone through which allowed them to reach the boss chamber rather fast. The entrance was open and to Agni's dissatisfaction, his favorite meal was not there. Instead, they found a few dwarves moving outside with large backpacks.

'Should I stop them...'

For a moment Roland contemplated using his newly gained position. He was a Knight Commander which put him above any guard or soldier in the city. When applying an analog from the real world, he was something similar to a police chief. If he wanted to stop this group that looked like miners, he could.

'Maybe another time, I need to teach those three how to grind out experience and not like a Knight Commander should perform searches on random people in the dungeon.'

His position was supposed to be something above a common guard. Perhaps if there were some lesser knights or guards here with him, then ordering them to do a search was proper. This group had several guards around them and didn't look too happy about something. When he examined their clothes it seemed that they had gone through some type of encounter.

'There shouldn't be any other monsters beyond this point, did they walk into the traps or get into a fight with other adventurers?'

For the time being he decided to make a mental note on the looks of these people along with using his runic camera to save their portrait. There was no reason to stop them but if he found out that they murdered people in the dungeon, then it was now his job to report them. They belonged to the dwarven union and some of their faces were familiar so finding them later wouldn't have been a problem. Soon Roland and the group continued onwards and finally arrived at their destination.

"This place was a lot more sparkly before."

Commented Lobelia while being the first one after Agni to run into this large mine. Even though there were some ore deposits here and there, it was a lot more barren than when he was the only one aware of this place. Clearly, the group that left before had something to do with it but they weren't the only ones responsible.

'Others are also picking at the rocks, we'll have to hire some proper guards along with the new route.'

Just as he expected, a lot of treasure hunters had arrived at this place. He could see at least three separate groups taking away the minerals from here as if there wasn't a problem anywhere.

"Now that it's known that this place has precious metals, even the adventurers have turned into scavengers."

"This mine belongs to Lord Arthur, how dare these hoodlums steal from him?"

Mary moved her hand towards her thigh where she had a few throwing knives hidden away. While she was usually wearing a maid uniform, this time around she came in dark leather. Her face was mostly covered by a combination of a hood and something akin to a ninja mask which went along with her current class.

"Hold on, just leave them be, we don't have time for this."

"But..."

"Don't worry, I've recorded all of their faces, after we return we can have the guard captain take care of it."

Mary knew about the technology where he could produce images. It wouldn't be hard to find these people and fine them for their actions later on. In a sense, they were performing free labor as they would probably give up all the mined materials to not get thrown into prison. Now came the important part, the entrance to the dungeon which was occupied by some people.

"Now first, let me show you something that you will need."

"We need even more? Is it a better weapon?"

"No."

"But you gave her some throwing knives and even Lobelia got arrows, why am I the only one being left out?"

"Because you don't have any ranged skills."

"What do I need ranged skills for, all I need are my fists!"

"That's why I didn't give you a weapon, you'd just end up killing yourself."

"What? You think I'd get killed by one of those monsters?"

"Yes."

"Damn, you didn't even hesitate, that hurts brother."

"I'm not your brother."

"Can I at least use that strange backpack with the rods attached to it?"

"Yes, but only use it when you get into trouble."

"Nice!"

Besides the scrolls with divine spells, he had given Lobelia a quiver filled with arrows and Mary some throwing knives with a similar effect. He did not want any of them getting too close to the tier 3 undead monster as he feared that they wouldn't even be able to take one attack without dying. Giving Armand a pair of knucklebusters so he could get himself killed was an enticing idea but Elodia would probably kill him if she found out. For the backup plan, they had a refurbished runic device that could generate a certain spell, if all things failed they were told to use it for their safety.

"Just look at this, Mary you probably remember this, Lord Arthur has a similar device in his office."

"Yes, it's the runic hologram."

The chessboard-size box that was at Arthur's office was similar to this one which was much smaller. With the help of his current class, he was able to compress it further and this would allow his friends here to progress through their training safely.

"Then this will be easy, as you can see these red dots represent the undead monsters in the dungeon area, you'll be able to prepare before they even show themselves."

The tactic for the grind was rather rudimentary. With the help of this device, they would wait for a monster to appear and then pelt him with some divine scrolls, arrows, or throwing knives. He instructed Lobelia and Mary to try and get their weapons back if it was possible but run if any danger appeared.

"Let's go in then, I'll clear the path."

While he had done all of this before, grinding directly at the dungeon entrance was impossible for them. For the time being he needed to prepare a location where they could perform the task without other people looking in. Having divine spells flying around was quite eye-catching and would probably draw unwanted attention.

"Agni, stay in the back for now and all of you remember to follow my instructions, otherwise I can't guarantee your safety."

"Woo! Lead the way, Knight Commander Wayland!"

"Show them hell, Knight Commander!"

Lobelia shouted out while cheering from behind and was quickly copied by Armand. Both of them kind didn't really see him as a proper noble and somewhat believed that there was something fishy here. Thus they did the only rational thing they could think of and decided to make fun of the situation.

"Oh shut up you two."

"Aye, aye. Commander!"

“Right... Let’s go...”

Chapter 344: Floaty Cubes.

“Wait here.”

“Are you going to be okay? Even if you are at tier 3, two monsters at once might be troublesome.”

“I’m going to be fine, it’s just two berserkers, they are the easiest to handle. They will blindly charge at anyone that gets in range. If you follow after me they might target you instead of me, it will complicate things.”

“If you say so... we’ll be cheering for you!”

“Agni you too, just wait here and protect them.”

“Woof!”

Lobelia gave Roland a big thumbs-up while smiling brightly. Behind her was Armand who repeated the gesture, Mary on the other hand continued to stare at the surroundings without saying much. She seemed to be constantly on the lookout for potential monsters, traps, and occurrences. It was clear that she was a true professional that didn’t let her emotions wander during a mission. Agni on the other hand seemed a bit disappointed but when he was ordered to protect the whole group his eyes perked up.

From the look of things, he judged the three people correctly. His two friends here were concerned with his life while the Ninja Maid was not. If something happened to him he could probably count on her prioritizing her own life. This was fine as their relationship was only blossoming. Perhaps after more time had passed, a better partnership bond could be created.

‘Two berserkers, I said that it wouldn’t be a problem but I’m not entirely sure myself...’

Even though Roland spoke confidently he still had some butterflies in his belly. In theory, the skeletal fiends that weren’t over level hundred sixty should pose no threats to him. They were weaker than Emmerson that he faced and also lacked tactical thinking. Their main skill was going berserk which enhanced physical stats.

They were usually endurance, strength, vitality, and agility. Yet there were debuffs that came with the power increase as their intelligence dropped by a significant amount. The stronger their power became, the dumber they got, and turned into rage monsters that could only react.

‘Will he end up like them when he advances?’

While moving forward away from his current party he glanced in Armand’s direction. His newest class was of the Berserker family and could become a problem in the future. It was possible to master this skill at the higher levels but it usually had a downside. Roland knew of it as he had engaged with Armand in single combat. If he wasn’t capable of defeating the enemy after his buffs ran out, then he would be at a massive disadvantage.

Name :

Armand L 121

Classes

T2 Fist Berserker L 21

T2 Pugilist L 50

T1 Warrior L 25

T1 Brawler L 25

‘But would it be smart to switch now, he is probably used to fighting with timed buffs and should know how to manage his resources. Would he even listen to me if I told him to take something less volatile?...’

Roland had to accept the fact that even if he told Armand to go with a specific class, his muscle-brained friend would probably go for another one on purpose. Perhaps if he went with a reverse psychology approach or asked Elodia to do it for him it could be possible. Yet there were merits to choosing such an iffy class.

The increase in physical stats was tremendous, it put them on the level or even above prestige classes. This meant that if Armand managed to progress enough in his stat-boosting skills and learned to control everything, his strength wouldn’t be something to scoff at.

‘There should be ways to alleviate the mind debuffs, I should be able to make something...’

There were mind-cleansing spells out in the world. Now that he could tap into the field of the magic of the priest and cleric classes, he could do something about it. This was even on of the tactics used by high leveled adventurers when a berserker was inside their group. A priest could calm their rage down if it got out of hand or install some buffs to let them focus better. With Roland’s skill set, he could probably create an automatic piece of armor that would cast the spell whenever Armand’s mind was affected. If he implemented this, he wouldn’t have to worry about getting a rough fisting from behind.

‘That would cover the idiot then what about Lobelia...’

Name :

Lobelia L 112

Classes

T2 Silent Arrow [Pathfinder] L 12

T2 Bow Rouge [Bow Expert] L50

T1 Thief [Scout] L25

T1 Archer L25

When analyzing Lobelia’s status screen he could see through the item she was using. It displayed her Thief class as the Scout class instead and also hid all of her other classes from view. There were special conditions to meet when getting the thief class. Usually, people looked down on others that went with

this route so this was expected. The adventurer guild wouldn't look down on them but this didn't mean that other adventurers wouldn't.

Lobelia was focused on ranged combat but not fully. The Bow Rogue class would help her with getting dagger-related skills. It was quite the expansive class that gave a person a lot of options and also opened up paths to various assassination professions. One of them was the Silent Arrow class which as the name stated, allowed people to remove sound when using ranged weapons involving arrows.

'She is a bit less problematic but I might have to enhance her status-altering enchantment, if I can decipher it so will others.'

She would just require regular archer-related equipment such as arrows. Her class was similar to Roland's and relied on outside sources. With the correct ammunition like elemental arrows for the right occasion she could potentially deal with almost any hurdle.

'Instead of making hundreds of various types of arrows, why don't I focus on designing multi-purpose ones just like with my armor? That'll probably save a lot of time and resources.'

Roland had been able to change the elemental attribute of his spells since forever now. While Lobelia didn't have any rune-related skills to alter the runic operating system, it was the same for him when he started out. Thus he already knew how to design the arrow shaft and tip for her. The only problem would be the materials as he couldn't just use regular wood.

When it came to Mary, on the other hand, he could see equipping her with some powerful stealth weapons. She was probably going with the assassination route, giving her something to cancel out sounds in a wider area would probably enhance her potential. Some spells that produced shadows or generated sounds in other areas would probably allow her to infiltrate areas better. Yet before she received her tier 3 class he wasn't sure what to go with. Throwing knives seemed to be something that she used normally and creating ones similar to the elemental arrows was a possibility too.

'Now let's focus on these two, at least those guys did their job with rigging this place up.'

On the small display screen inside of his helmet, he could see the entire dungeon area. All the corridors and rooms that had monsters crawling in them, were all showing up. They were represented by red dots while any person of the races by green dots. Thanks to this he could calmly approach his next target.

Infernal Skeleton Berserker

L157

'Both at the same level, they seem to be moving on a pattern.'

There was an additional feature in his map as his armor was capable of storing data. The same was for the sensors but their storage capacity was limited and would reset after a while. They were somewhat similar to cameras at a store that needed their tapes replaced. All these monsters were on rigid paths that never changed. There was one constant pattern that in this case would repeat every one and a half hours.

'The closer one should start moving towards this corridor in a minute while the other will remain there. That's good, I can take care of him without immediately getting attacked by the other one.'

It was time to test out a few things from his arsenal. With a little help from his multiple minds, he activated the storage space that was integrated into his back. A ripple in space could be faintly seen as a cube-shaped object emerged from within. It was followed by three identical ones and before dropping down to the ground they started glowing.

All four activated almost instantly after being deployed and showed off the various glowing runes they were inscribed with. Normally Roland needed to use his mage hand spell to hold items up but these four cubes didn't need it. Instead, they equaled themselves with the help of the levitation spell they were equipped with. Two of them floated over to where his shoulders were and remained slightly above them. The other pair made their way to the sides and remained at around waist level.

'Connection seems fine, mana transfer is at over 90%.'

He nodded while looking at his display. These floating cubes with rods attached to them had their own batteries but they had other ways of keeping themselves afloat. As long as they came back and hovered around Roland's body he could share his mana with them. The further away they got the harder this process became and more mana was lost. However, they had enough energy to last through a few battles and this would be the time to test them.

"Time to go, Bit three and four, attack the designated target, and keep your distance."

While he didn't have to use a voiced command he wanted to test the feature. It was possible to later integrate the floating devices into his workshop or into the city. For this, he would need them to be able to receive commands from other people that couldn't access the runic components as he could. Other golems that were in the world already had those features and he needed to keep up with all the other craftsmen.

Just as he commanded, the two cubes started floating forward. They were integrated into his map system in a way that allowed him to pinpoint the target. After going around the corner they quickly floated out of the range of the first skeletal berserker and continued on their way to the true target.

"Hey, your opponent is me, so try to focus..."

This didn't mean that the monster wouldn't go after them. The moment the two floating units were before it, the monster started charging. Luckily this dungeon had quite a large ceiling and this skeleton was in possession of no ranged weaponry. This didn't mean that it wouldn't be able to jump high enough to swipe at it with the help of its massive claw-like hands.

Before it did though its opponent appeared in the form of a large armored man. Roland took aim with his hand stretched out and immediately activated one of the tier 2 divine attacking spells. A bolt of sparkling flames escaped from his palm and connected with the monster that was distracted by the flying cubes. The moment the divine energy touched the undead monster's bones a quick reaction took place.

The Berserker gave out a strange low-pitched howling sound as if it was in pain. Its whole body started going up in flames as the effect of this spell took over. It wasn't just a simple bolt of magical energy. The divine pattern came from Solaria, the goddess of the sun. Roland discovered that this type of wavelength worked together with fire spells which burned quite well. This combination allowed for a long-lasting damage over time effect to take place which would persist for a while.

'Its health points are going down rapidly and the bits are managing to hold their own against the other one...'

This was not a true fight but more of a test for the spells that he inscribed for the other three people that came with him. He made sure to mimic the output of the scribed spells, if he overloaded them with his skills then the test wouldn't really matter. The monster continued to burn but one hit didn't kill it.

'As expected, one won't be enough but...'

While the monster was still alive and moving forward, its steps had become sluggish. It didn't seem like something a tier 3 creature should be limited to. The weakness to divine spells that undead creatures possessed was truly massive. They didn't just suffer a lot of damage but also received a debuff.

Divine Retribution

Debuff

All undead beings under this effect have all their stats lowered by 40%

As long as the burning effect lasted, the monster would continue to suffer this massive weakness. This was a drastic decrease in stats that brought the monster down to the level of tier 2 class holders. It was thanks to this effect that this place made the perfect grinding ground. If he had been capable of producing this effect in the past, he might have actually been able to explore this dungeon before reaching tier 3.

"Two should do it..."

With another hit, the monster's legs began to crumble. Even though it continued crawling his way the persistent burning effect managed to finish it off. The scrolls that he created packed a punch and were so large for a reason. Even though they only contained tier 2 spells, they were all empowered divine spells that contained his own mana. If they connected with the target once then it was over for the monsters.

Now it was time for the second monster that had just launched itself in his direction. Even though the flying bits were capable of producing beams of mana, the monster was more interested in the divine energies. It was a strange occurrence, even though undead were susceptible to divine energies they were drawn to them. They would target any person that cast these types of spells. Of course, he knew this and was prepared to blast this charging maniac as well.

'This one is wearing some better armor but it shouldn't be a problem.'

This large skeletal monster had a rude awakening as something collided with his rear end. It instantly stopped in its tracks as it could feel the bones that it was made of start to crack. The attract came from behind and it belonged to one of the flying cubes. While they were not capable of producing the same divine spell as the one he previously used, they still could provide some fire support.

The other two cubes that were hovering around his shoulders were activated as well. They flew forward while zooming around the air at strange angles. These devices came equipped with a few possible flight paths that were meant to confuse their targets. It did the trick as the monster found itself unable to keep up or to decide on the one he should target.

Roland decided to hang out in the background while moving in closer. What was happening in front was quite the show. The monster was constantly getting hit by yellow beams of light. They were like tiny long thin laser beams and with each hit, the creature grew slower. The same debuffing effect was activated to slow down the monster's agility. With it not having any way of reaching the floating cubes nor any intelligence to grab a rock to throw at them, the monster was soon defeated.

"This would probably not work against a Lich or a Champion with a shield... but that's why I chose this room."

Roland looked at the crumbling monster that was barely moving. It was still alive and that was what he was aiming for. After getting closer he felt strange, the enemy was defeated but it felt too easy. These things were capable of murdering him without any trouble just a few months ago but now, they wouldn't even be able to scratch his heavy armor.

'Hanging around this level won't do me any good... I need to explore the lower levels if I want to actually level up.'

He reached out toward the monster's chest to grab something. The moment he grasped it and pulled the monster gave out its last howl. After a quick scan with his analyzing skill, he nodded and put the round object into his spatial space.

Infernal Skeleton Core

'I wonder if I can get one from a Lich...'

At first, he wasn't happy that he needed his mana to activate his storage but now he thought differently. Even if his armor was stolen by someone, it would have been impossible for them to access his items. No one would even suspect that there was such an option integrated into a heavy suit of armor like his. They would just look for any pouches on the sides that contained some items he didn't care much about.

'I should call those three over, I'll guard them for now but I can't babysit them forever.'

There were many things that he wanted to discover in this dungeon. The Platinum Adventurers had given a report but he couldn't fully trust them. Without exploring everything himself and affixing more sensors could he truly get this place under his control.