

Runesmith 351

Chapter 351: Odd Chief.

'Could it be someone from my 'family'? No that makes no sense, Robert should be nowhere near here and my name shouldn't have leaked. Could it be someone from the Arden house? Maybe someone that he trusts?'

Roland was making his way down the street while wondering about Arthur's visitor. From the short conversation he had with him, this individual was somehow interested in his runic items. This didn't help much, even the city lord himself was pretty fond of the magical creations and so would other people.

'I guess I'll find out when I get there, he sounded more perplexed than afraid so it should be fine...'

After racking his head a bit he decided not to worry too much. From the tone, it didn't seem that it was anything that urgent. The situation was probably not that grave as Arthur never mentioned an adversary. However, just to make things less troublesome he decided to peek at the runic camera's that he installed throughout the Valerian vila. While the image quality was still not the best it would answer a few questions.

'Hm, are those the dwarves? Why are there so many of them... There is someone in the middle but it's too blurry to make out the face.'

Roland started squinting while trying to examine the footage. The recording showed a group of dwarves arriving at the front gate. Two of the faces were easily recognizable as he had multiple run-ins with the union.

'Dunan and Bamur are in the front, by the way, they are acting... the person in the middle must be the master craftsman the Union sent here...'

It didn't take him long to figure out what the situation was. His theory was confirmed after passing some carriages that had the Union's symbol on them. It was clear that his competition had finally sent out someone to truly compete with him. This person had probably arrived at the Villa to voice their complaints and the entourage they brought along was probably there to back them up.

'What do those dwarves want? Hope they won't try to use blackmail again...'

His history with the Union was long and tiresome. They had tried to price him out of the city and also forced all the shop owners to ghost him. Only thanks to Arthur and the thieves guild was it possible for him to make it through that period of his life. Now he had some semblance of power but the Union was still a big player here. Even if he wanted nothing more than to send them packing, they had a lot of money and were not easily replaced.

'Ugh, I'm already getting a headache just thinking about this...'

At this stage, the city wasn't there yet. There were many streets that needed to be laid out with wires to power the street lights. Then he also needed to create various runic items that could use the supplied mana. The mining area needed to be secured as they needed a steady supply of mana crystals from it. Before they created more wind generators or went geothermal, they needed to subsidize it through the mine.

Getting into another war with the dwarven Union could waste a lot of money. Arthur could of course throw them out of the city but it would set them back by at least half a year. The tax revenue that they were receiving from their shops was immense and replacing them with other craftsmen would take a while. With the influx of new adventurers, they needed to supply all the demand for magical weaponry.

“Greetings, Knight Commander!”

“At ease.”

He was greeted by the guards at the gate that saluted almost instantly when they saw him. Even now he was still getting used to how they treated him. In their eyes, he was some mysterious knight that had been hiding out in plain sight. Some even worried that he would seek vengeance for the times they gave him the stink eye. Such things didn't really bother him as he had no pride concerning his noble heritage or being a knight.

“Why are these people here?”

“They arrived along with the new master craftsman, Commander!”

His newfound position at least made it easy for him to get information. To the side, there were about twenty dwarves that clearly belonged to the union. They had created a little spot for themselves on the side of the road and were probably waiting for their leader to return from the Villa.

‘Those two aren't there so they must have gone inside along with the new guy...’

Roland could already see himself getting shouted out by an old dwarf with more experience than him. While he was a full-fledged runesmith his work mostly focused on the runes. This person that arrived could be his senior and superior in the way of runes. Yet, he was no slouch either and was also interested in some input.

‘It wouldn't be bad to have someone to bounce my ideas off... but considering that this is the union that we are speaking about, they might demand that I hand over all of my schematics...’

In the past, all of his runes came from using his debugging skill. After copying and analyzing pre-existing runic structures he was able to reverse engineer the designs. These of course originated somewhere, it was worrisome if he had some angry dwarf accusing him of plagiarizing. Yet, laws against this didn't exist so it was unlikely that such accusations would amount to anything.

“Did you see this master craftsman? How did they seem to you?”

“No Sir, they were behind all the dwarves, I didn't really take a good look...”

“Hmm... Try to get a better look next time.”

“Y-yes sir! My apologies, Commander. Miss Mary received the guests so I...”

The soldier looked a bit frightened by his response and started bowing to the point of his helmet falling down. Roland was taken aback by this reaction but soon realized that it wasn't so strange. This man's life could be taken away in an instant if he was deemed useless by someone of his position.

“It's fine if Mary was there.”

After scaring the poor guard at the entrance he headed in. The dwarves that were there he remembered from within the city. His intelligence stat allowed him to remember faces quite well. These were not any normal craftsmen, they were all in higher positions and were even allowed to have apprentices.

'There are even some shop owners here, they really cherish their master craftsmen, don't they?'

This reminded him a bit of the time he tried informing his father about his goal of becoming a runesmith. His old man didn't want to have any of it but his attempt at teaching him a lesson backfired. Now he was there and already a tier 3 class holder in his early twenties.

The human race that he was part of didn't treat their workers as well as the dwarven race did. To them, they were just a means to an end. The people wielding the weapons were far more important than the ones making them. It was easier to replace a craftsman or buy something from the union than to train a soldier.

"Hm? One of the turrets just went offline. What are they doing there?"

Roland mumbled to himself while glancing at his small display screen. Due to this being an unforeseen trip, he decided to wear his full bulky armor. Through its mapping device, he could see the layout of the whole villa and the turrets placed on the walls. One of them just went offline while he was walking.

'Could this person have similar skills to me or did they use something like the anti-magical powder?'

Normally, no one should have been able to access his runic device but it was shut down by an external force. When he tried to access the golemic eyes in the vicinity, there also was no signal. His steps became slightly faster as he needed to get to the bottom of this. Could this person be actually planning to cause some trouble and would he be there in time before something happened to Arthur?

If the city lord perished, his father could hold him accountable. Under this assumption, he started rushing over to the back of the villa where Arthur's and Mary's dots were still visible. When he arrived there the dwarves that went by the names Bamur and Dunan were there. They were not alone as a third member from their race was with them.

'Is that the master craftsman?'

To his surprise, there was something different about this person. First of all, they were tinkering with his turret while standing up on a ladder that was being held up by the Enchantsmith, Bamur. The person on top of the ladder had the height of a dwarf but they didn't look as bulky and their figure was slightly off.

"Awright, wha made this? th' outside looks like 'twas shat out by a donkey bit th' runes aren't half bad."

'It's a woman?'

The voice was a bit lower but it sounded like it belonged to a woman. She was also smaller than the other dwarven craftsmen with her arms also not being as thick. Compared to a human she looked quite gruff and stocky but her figure belonged to that of a woman.

It was quite a surprising turn of events. Roland didn't expect to see a woman be the new chief of the union branch here. Society in this world was mostly patriarchal in nature, it wasn't forbidden but there were some roadblocks set up for people like this woman here. If she managed to gain this spot, then it meant that she either worked extra hard or had ties to some people that could pull strings.

Name:

Brylvia L 234

Classes:

T3 Master Runesmith L59

T2 Runic Golem Craftsman L50

T2 Runesmith L50

T1 Mana Scribe L25

T1 Blacksmith L25

T1 Mage L25

“What th'...? Who did that? Wis it ye...”

Without thinking he used his analyzing skill on the person before him. This time around the person he was trying to inspect had the usual status blocking item. He was quick to use his method to go around it but to his surprise, this person realized what had been done.

“Ah, if it isn't Sir Wayland, jus the man we were waiting for.”

“ ‘Ey, don't ignore me! Ah don't care if ye'r a knight or something, ye shouldn't peek at a lassies intimates lik' that”

“Lasses intimates? Uh, care to explain?”

Arthur posed the question while quickly moving in his direction. Mary was also there keeping an eye out but she remained in the role of the maid. It didn't seem that she was that interested in this master runesmith. Considering that Mary was very pedantic about the safety of her lord, it was probable that there was no danger here. This didn't mean that he wasn't in danger, as the woman that looked to be in her mid-thirties was stomping his way.

The most obvious part was the lack of facial hair which the men wouldn't be seen without. Her hair was long and braided back into a bun. While her body wasn't exposed, Roland could tell that those arms were packing some meat. Her hands had visible calluses that some women would rather hide behind some gloves.

Dwarves on the other hand liked to show them off. The rougher their hands were, the better. Her face when going by human standards was on the rougher side. She was certainly not someone that cared about makeup but her face wasn't that bad either. There was a certain fire in those eyes that drew him in and her chest was not something to scoff at either.

“I just went through her status screen, that's all.”

“Is that so?”

“My apologies if I offended you but I am responsible for the Lord's safety.”

“Th’ Lord’s safety?”

It was better to shove the blame onto his responsibilities as a knight. In a way, he was required to check for her status and anything that could be deemed suspicious. Without having a good retort the woman seemed to back away from this problem. Her status screen reminded him of his own ascension ritual which had those same classes as potential choices.

‘Looks like the usual runesmith path that any Master Runesmith takes but she will probably be superior to me when it comes to blacksmithing... and that golem class might give her some insights that I could be lacking...’

If it was possible he would rather remain on neutral grounds with this person. However, the first impression was now gone and he was caught spying on her status screen while going through her blocking device.

“Yes...”

“If ye wur able to do that... Urr ye maybe th' lad a've been hearing about?”

“Aye chief this wis th' person, he is responsible fur a' o' it!”

Before they could continue with their conversations, Dunan rushed in from the side. It was the same dwarf that he wrestled the orichalcum anvil from. It was no secret that both of them didn't like each other and perhaps the younger dwarf was waiting for their new leader to chew him up for it. Harsh words left the mouth of this woman but they weren't directed at him.

“Wha said that ye could speak? Did yer mother not teach ye proper manners?”

The one getting chewed was Dunan and not Roland. He even received a smack to the back of the head from his superior that he couldn't do anything about. Bamur, who would usually back up his fellow union member, remained in the background without even letting out a peep. She was keeping the two on a short leash and not taking any back talking, when Dunan tried raising his voice he was instantly smacked again.

‘Is she his mother or something? The two look like kids that did something wrong.’

It brought a small smile onto his face to see the Union dwarves getting some pushback but he couldn't relax yet. What did this woman come here for and why was she tinkering with his turrets? Was she actually trying to get to his secrets or here to complain about his unorthodox use of runemithing?

“Just go stand thare 'n' hold yer mouth.”

The two nodded and quickly moved to the side. Now he was left looking at the small woman that was around one hundred and forty centimeters. Dwarves in this world were usually somewhere between one hundred twenty and up to a hundred fifty centimeters in height. She was taller than the usual female of her race and also the reason why he at first took her for a man.

“Are ye th' one that created that monstrosity?”

“Monstrosity? Are you talking about the runic turret?”

“So ye gave it a name.”

“Yes? Is there something wrong with it?”

“Wrong wi' it? Where do ah even start? Th' shoddy design, th' unpolished edges... How can something be so ill yet... Yet so exquisite at the same time?”

“Huh?”

“How does it not explode? How did ye do it? Ye must tell me, how did ye git around th' trace expansion problem?”

“Trace expansion? Ah I guess it goes around the standard route that other similar devices use...”

To his surprise, the woman started suddenly praising his runic turret. While the outer shell looked abysmal in her eyes. The components that made out the heart of this creation were worthwhile to look into. Roland used a lot of runes as their base but liked to play around with the components to get as much efficiency as humanly possible. This left most of his creations to be over-tuned on the inside but somewhat plain on the outside.

“Wait, is this why I was called here?”

“Ah yes, Master Brylvia was intrigued by the various magical contraptions around the city. Why don't you have a chat with her while Mary prepares some tea?”

“...”

Roland could tell that Arthur here was attempting to sweet talk himself into another good deal. The woman before them was the new leader of the dwarven union that they had bad relations with. Her presence was something that they would probably need to live with for some years. Roland realized that Arthur wanted him to make a good impression. This explained why he allowed her to tinker with the runic turrets and the golem eye system around the villa.

“That armor... Those runes... Marvelous could ye tak' it aff?”

“You want me to take off my armor?”

“It'll be hard to examine it while yer sportin' it, yeah?”

For a moment he could have sworn that he saw some drool running down her mouth that she quickly whipped away. When looking in her eyes for a moment he remembered a certain noble mage that was too much into runes. This dwarven lady was similar and it didn't seem like she would take no for an answer.

Chapter 352: Forced Apology.

“Master Brylvia... could you not...”

“Whit do yi'll want me to do? if ye don't tak' it aff, then ah have to examine it this wey, now hush a'm needin' to focus! On the runes, this is so fascinating yit so impractical it boggles th' mind. How much mana wid ya need to activate such a runic component...”

“Ha ha, I see that you have formed a bond between craftsmen but perhaps we should have a small chat together about the future of this city and perhaps the new partnership with the Union!”

“As long as it gets me out of here...”

“Hey, stop movin!”

Roland tried to pull his arm away as it was being examined by a rather strange dwarven woman. She was wearing some special glasses that had something that looked like a magnifying apparatus attached to it. This little gizmo when looked through allowed the Master Runesmith to magnify the traces better to get to the heart of the components.

Brylvia the new Union Chief craftswoman and the new leader of the dwarves in the city had taken a liking to his armor. He was astonished that she had no quarrels about getting closer and trying to yank his gauntlets from his arms. An attempt to go for his helmet was also made but she was too short to lift it above his head. While he didn't want to have anyone investigate his suit, it was also interesting to see someone from his own profession.

The woman was a Master Runesmith, something that he once aimed to become when he started out at the age of ten. She had all the textbook classes like mana scribe, mage, and blacksmith without the runic variants being there. Not many people that were given the mage class would choose this profession without belonging to the dwarven race. There was a reason why almost no runesmiths existed that weren't part of their group. The mage class offered a lot of possibilities that didn't involve tiresome work at a stuffy smithy.

“Please, I'm sure Master Wayland will allow you to look through his creations later. First though, perhaps we should discuss an agreement?”

“Ye wish to do business?”

“Of course, as explained before, my head knight who is also the one that created that armor has not been on good terms with your people, I wish to remedy that and let bygones be bygones.”

“Ah thought ye wur trying to pull a fast yin on me, bit this lad seems to be th' genuine article. Hm...”

After hearing Arthur's points, the dwarven woman decided to look away from the runes on his armor. Even though she belonged to the Union it didn't mean that her opinions and motives were the same. Instead, it looked like she was far more interested in his body of work than that he was a human runesmith.

“So thay really did that, ah will have to apologize on thair behalf. Ah have hoped that the idiots would learn something wi' age bit old habits die hard. But... oh weel, that's just how those mallet-heads 're, can not do much 'bout it.”

The woman shrugged while grinning in Roland's direction. He wasn't sure what to make of it but at least at this moment, it didn't feel like she saw him in a negative light. The two other dwarves that previously led the branch didn't like him and didn't change their tune to this day. While Roland was sometimes petty, this didn't mean that he couldn't see the broader picture.

‘Is she actually willing to work with me? Wouldn't this make my work a lot easier?’

The current main issue was his position. He was acting as the head knight and had some troublesome duties. This didn't allow him to leave the city too hastily and he was even forced to monitor Arthur's villa. There were even incidents with trespassers that probably belonged to some information guilds. Everyone was trying to gather information on the new Valerian son that was rising in fame.

Watching over Arthur, instructing the construction workers with the runic wires, and also having to produce them himself. Assembling home appliances and working on a way to magically innovate the city. Helping Mary along with his friends to level up and finally do it himself. All of these things had to be done and if he had an actual master runesmith to push some of the load of, it was something he had to keep in mind.

'A Dwarven Master Runesmith does never wander alone, she must have a few regular runesmiths under her wing, with multiple people like that around...'

There were a lot of advantages if he decided to work with the union. However, they had already wronged him once and he could not just trust this unknown person. While she seemed more interested in his armor than anything else, perhaps that would be all that he was to her. He could see their partnership ending the moment all of his smithing secrets had been revealed.

'It has to be an equal trade. I at least need to get something else from this if they decide to screw me over in the end.'

Roland was a lot more experienced now and knew what to look out for. Arthur was also here so it wouldn't be hard to draw up a few binding contracts. This was all going to be a business partnership where all the sides were profiting. There were a lot of things that the Union could take care of for them but a line needed to be drawn.

"Can't do much about it? I don't think I'll be satisfied with just that?"

"Oh? Was there more to it?"

Brylvia looked to Arthur who was sitting on the other end. All of them were outside in the same location he had invited Knight Commander Emmerson before. Previously he had explained some things but even Arthur didn't know the full extent of the bullying received from the dwarven union. Roland somewhat glossed over a few details that also involved him having to work together with black market merchants. It was no laughing matter and normally someone in his situation would have been forced out of the city, or into an unfavorable contract.

"I'm not sure what your colleagues have told you, probably some nonsense to make themselves look better but it's not something that can be forgiven with a simple apology. Plus as you saw, they weren't very apologetic and tried to shove the blame on me."

"Ah see that yer lad will not just let it be, just lik' ye said, m' lord."

Roland was a bit out of the loop here, before he arrived at the villa Arthur and his guest had ample time to chat. It was possible that he mentioned the people that wronged him. The two that were the biggest troublemakers were even here and they tried to paint him as being in the wrong. Brylvia even saw Dunan trying to make excuses when Roland arrived.

"Very well, Kin ye call them idiots ower?"

The Woman looked towards Mary and after getting a confirming nod from Arthur she headed out. After a minute, Dunan and Bamur were before them. Both didn't look very well and were somewhat nervously sweating. Roland didn't know what she was trying to do but it seemed that the two would be in for it.

"Dunan, Bamur."

"Y-yes?"

"Apologize, to master Wayland 'ere."

"Apologize?"

"Do ah have to repeat maself? Wha do ye think yer talking to?"

"B-but Master Brylvia..."

"Don't ye Master Brylvia me, Lower yer head an apologize, now!"

To Roland's surprise, the scene devolved to Brylvia shouting at the two dwarven craftsmen. It reminded him of a mother having to force their kids to say sorry. The two were adamantly refusing the order but when they did, all hell broke loose. It was quite a sight to see her fists descending on their heads. Her level was quite high and the strength increase from smithing classes was tremendous. It only took one hit per person to knock them down to the ground and out for the count.

"Ah didn't hit ye that hard, git up!"

"Ah... Ah apologize, please stop hitting me..."

"Aye, me too... I wus wrong!"

No one stopped the woman from giving the two dwarves a few bruises. Arthur that was watching this seemed happier than Roland who wasn't sure what to make of it. If a few punches to the face didn't really make the years of struggles any better. He remained quiet while staring down at the two kneeling men as if waiting for something.

"Aye... Ye'll be demoted back to th' apprentice position."

"A-apprentice?"

"Ye, dat enough?"

Dunan's pale complexion got even worse after he heard the decision. He along with Bamur were above level hundred and just needed a few more years to reach their next ascension. Relegating them back to apprentice positions might have seemed like a slap on the wrist but in the dwarven circles, this was serious.

The people from the Union ran a business and they kept track of a person's history. If someone wanted to rise up in the ranks of their company, they needed a clean slate. Having both of them getting demoted would stick with them for the rest of their lives. Other master craftsmen would probably shy away from taking them under their wing. They would be marked as troublemakers unfit to run their own workplaces and running a smithy was usually their goal.

“Yes, I think that’s enough...”

“Great, now git out ye two.”

“A-aye...”

There was something refreshing in seeing people that had wronged you getting smacked around. The two had some choices but their career would be severely impacted if they decided to leave this place. Getting monetary support wouldn’t be as easy and they were still not at tier 3 level which allowed some wiggle room. Roland expected them not to go against that status quo and for the time being, settle in the background until things quieted down. The potential for a future enemy was there but he was already so far above their level that he didn't consider them to be serious enemies.

‘They will be forced to work on lower level equipment which will slow down their leveling, this could set them back by years, was this what she is aiming at?’

Roland was a proponent of the eye for an eye dogma. They had tried to halt his progress but failed. This type of punishment would align with his values as he did not really wish death or harm on these two. They never sent any assassins, nor tried to force him out of his home. It was perhaps time to move on with this part of his life. He had advanced past the Union’s clutches and would just slow his progress if he didn’t take this offer.

“Ah hope this settles it?”

“It does.”

“Great, now could ye shaw me that helmet fur a moment...”

“I will not.”

“Damn. Then, how about a trade instead?”

“A trade?”

It seemed that the woman wanted to offer him something in return for analyzing his suit of armor. While he was not planning to disclose the schematics to this armor there were a few things he was fine with parting. In return perhaps he would be allowed to peek at the work of this Master Runesmith and her apprentices to see if he was deficient at something. At this point in his life, he was skilled enough to notice such things rather quickly. Even a glance at a true master's work could help him improve his craft exponentially.

“Ah, may I cut in for a moment? If we are going to discuss any dealings with my Head Knight, I will have to involve myself.”

Before the conversation could continue Arthur decided to cut in. Roland nodded as he also wished to discuss the issues in the city and how they could tackle them together with the newly run dwarven Union.

“Ah ye, the talk from before?”

“Precisely. As you may have heard there is a mine in the dungeon. I was planning to hire a non-Union-run company but if we are going to work together, then perhaps I won’t need to.”

The woman nodded as Arthur brought forth the issue of the mine. Roland had previously advised him to not sell the rights and not rent it. They needed the mana crystals that formed there to run their new mana power plant. Yet getting experienced miners wasn’t that easy. The team from the Union was already there so it would be a quick remedy to their issue if they could work out a good enough deal.

“If yi’ll want mah men to help out down thare, ye’ll have to gimme a good enough deal...”

She replied while sneaking some glances at Roland’s runes. In response, he looked at Arthur and started shaking his head.

“Now now, I’m sure we can come to an agreement. Maybe my Head Knight won’t part with his intricate armor but perhaps you could trade some secrets between each other at a more private location? I’m sure there will be enough room at your great workshop for another skilled Runesmith like him?”

“Aye, that sounds reasonable...”

“I’m glad that you think so... How about we change locations and discuss things more thoroughly?”

“That might be better... But a'm needin' mah assistant. Making contracts is not mah strength.”

“An assistant of a Master Runesmith is always welcome.”

Soon Mary with a few other maids appeared with the said assistant. It was a rather plain-looking dwarf that was somewhat on the shorter side. His clothes were also different compared to the other craftsmen. He was more similar to a butler and even without giving him a scan Roland knew that he was probably closer to an accountant. Soon all of them went away to discuss the future of the city which would hopefully ease the workload that was crushing down on his shoulders.

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“No please, I did everything that you wanted me... why are you doing this...”

“Why are we doing this? Because it’s fun!”

“ARGHHHHhhhhh”

A high-pitched scream echoed through the dark room as a black dagger went through a bond man’s chest. As the weapon pressed in a strange puss-like substance started oozing out instead of blood. The sounds of sizzling flesh were drawn out by the screams of the man that was being tortured. Yet before he could continue screaming his whole head rolled to the side in an instant.

“Hey, why did you have to spoil the fun, you dumb Warlock!”

“Stop wasting time.”

“Having fun is never wasting time, you should try it too!”

In one of the corners of this dungeon room, a man covered by a dark robe was standing. Something akin to a tendril with a sharp ending started slithering back into his sleeve along with some of the blood of

the prisoner that was just killed. Compared to the other person here his frame was larger and his voice deeper.

“Such a shame, he was also a looker, no wonder he was able to scam all those noble ladies.”

The woman picked up the head that rolled to the side only to examine the dead man’s features. Then out of nowhere, she tossed it upwards while pulling out two matching black-edged daggers. The blades moved like lightning bolts toward the head and turned it into multiple slices.

“Are you two done? Good. We have gotten a request from a temple, you two have been chosen.”

“Another mission already? They are really working us down to the bone, at least this is the last one!”

The person with the daggers cackled while looking at a third robed figure that had entered through a prison-like door. This individual was somewhat hunched over and their digits were extremely long and thin. The two people inside the room waited for the man to enter before leaving themselves.

On the outside, they ended up in a wider area with torches producing green light. Every so often a scream entered this area and pushed the flames around. Many similar opened or closed dungeon chambers continued to appear with various other robed people inside. Marks that involved occult magics written in blood were everywhere and the smell of death and decay filled the air.

“I wonder where they will send us this time? Oh, I hope it’s somewhere nice, I haven’t had my hair done in a while!”

“...”

The woman continued to babble on while the strange man followed after her without uttering a word. Both of their figures slowly faded into the darkness while the grunts and screams continued to spread through this cold and damp place. Even after one died down another soon took their place in a seemingly never-ending serenade of pain and anguish.