

Runesmith 57

[Chapter 57 Into the mountains.](#)

Roland was one of the first new arrivals but he wasn't the last. There were other people that wanted to travel in this large caravan gathering. Luckily the cart he was using was stocked to the brim and most people came in larger groups. This saved him from having travel companions in the cart he chose.

He was sitting at the back end of it, so he also didn't need to talk or look at the coachman. This was the perfect spot for someone like him that didn't really see the point of interacting with these people.

While sitting and waiting he glanced outside, he noticed some people gathering. He could see some of the adventurers arriving while wearing various types of armor.

Roland was already someone that had dipped his toes in the blacksmithing profession. He could already spot some areas that were unkempt. Chinks in the armors, old leather belts that were about to snap, and even badly made runic weapons.

He had a small itch behind his ear while glancing at the last category. He wanted to go grab some of those weapons and correct the runic structure. Such an act would give out his profession and he wanted to avoid that.

After spending days on the train without working on any metal he was feeling bored. He didn't think he would be missing rune crafting and smithing this much. In a world lacking anything that interested him that much and while having no hobbies, creating runic items was his only pastime.

Other than the adventurers he could see other travelers arriving. They all varied by looks, age, and even by their race. The caravan was slowly getting filled up with people and soon they would be leaving.

Roland took note of how many people there were. This convoy of caravans was the largest he had been part of yet. There were even more people here than when he went on that expedition to the mines.

Some of the people that were coming brought their own guards along, so there was some backup for the adventurers that only had slightly more than ten people. By the gear they were using it was easy to speculate what class they had. Most of them as always were holders of the warrior class.

Most of them looked older, thus Roland believed that they should be at least tier 2. It was normal to be a tier 1 class if you were below 20 years of age but just like him, some people leveled up faster. If he continued his old pace he thought he would be at the L25 cap within the year. Now maybe even faster if he entered a dungeon and farmed some XP.

After gathering enough information about his surroundings Roland leaned back into his carriage. He wanted to practice his mana reinforcement skill while he traveled. He couldn't remove his clothes this time around to get more mana in. With monsters and strangers around it would be unwise to remove his armor. His mana shield enchantments couldn't activate on their own quite yet. He wanted to develop a rune that would repel weapons and attacks on impact. He just needed to figure out the minimum requirement for it to activate. If he set it too low it might activate while he was running, while when too high it would be useless.

He had one technique that he wanted to try but he needed more time to develop his crafting. He wanted to try placing the impact detecting components deeper into the metal. With this when a sword pierced into it more than a millimeter it would set off the defensive measure.

It would also need to work with blunt force, like hits from maces. Bending the metal more than it should also set it off. The problem would be to not make it react to other outside forces like gravity.

He couldn't have it activating if he jumped from a high spot and it turned on when he landed. With his increased stats he could perform superhuman feats by this point. His strength was already above any grown man from his old world.

It would be quite hard to develop something like that but it would be a lifesaver if he got attacked from the back. For now, he only knew how to produce simple runes that activated on impact or on a timer. He could somewhat play around with their settings but he didn't have full control over it. He was still limited to the hardware and could not affect the software yet.

'Wonder If it will be possible when I reach tier 2...'

He rubbed his chin while thinking. The biggest drawback of his debugging skill was that he couldn't see inside the components. It was like looking at a motherboard, he could insert what parts he wanted but was limited to premade ones. He could keep replacing the processor and hard drives that he knew off but he couldn't affect the software in them. When he achieved that step only then he would feel like a true runesmith.

While he was contemplating some new designs he felt the carriage that he was sitting in jolt forward. They were finally setting off, he could see some people riding on horses and even large birds that looked like giant chickens. They were lankier and their legs had sharp claws than regular poultry.

This journey would take at least a week as they would be making a lot of stops along the way. This kingdom wasn't a safe place outside the large cities. There were monsters prowling everywhere only shying away from large human gatherings.

These monsters had their migration circles and some even set up their own territories. If they arrived in a new one that some kind of goblin tribe established battle was inevitable. They had a lot of adventurers with them as well as some guards. Roland felt that their group should be able to defend themselves during a fight.

He was only a traveler and not affiliated with the guild for now so he wouldn't even need to take part in the skirmishes. It was better to lay low, the abyssal cult could be following him now or later. If he stuck out too much word would spread. There weren't that many mages around and they clearly saw him using a fire arrow spell that time.

Roland looked to his side where he had the weapon that he created. He could pretend that he was a mana warrior with it. With the addition of his blacksmith class, he should have enough strength to match others. His high intelligence would just make the magic attacks that came from this sword stronger.

He heard the people talking and they finally moved forward. The carriage he was riding in was just a simple one which meant that it would be a bumpy ride. Without going into the lotus position he closed his eyes, his mana exercises continued as he needed to increase his mana pool.

This was a bumpy ride so concentrating on his new skill would prove a challenge. On the flipside, this would help him train his willpower and concentration.

The trip continued through dirt roads, he could see the city he was in vanishing in the distance after a few hours. They drove through some villages on the way before coming in for a stop as the night dawned on them.

Even though he didn't want to mingle with the others, he became quite hungry. The traders responsible for this expedition set up camp. The wagons were positioned in a circle around the campfire, they would act as cover if someone decided to attack them with ranged attacks.

Roland grumbled slightly while moving his hood over his head. After a life filled with solitude, his linguistic skills started suffering. He had become more socially awkward after years of evading people and hiding from his family. Speaking out to strangers without a reason became harder.

He slowly walked over to the campfire. An older lady was cooking something up and it smelled quite nice. When he got closer his mouth started watering. The people were lining up so he followed suit and placed himself at the end of the line.

After leaving the confines of the large wagon that he secluded himself in, Roland was finally able to see who else was here. There was a mix of races, mostly ones that he had seen before but most of them were humans like him.

Nearly all of the people here were merchants and peddlers. Besides them, there were the adventurers and some armored guards. There also was a family with a baby which caused him to stare. It was an unusual thing for someone like them to travel like this, maybe they were also trying to find a better place to stay as he did.

There was another odd thing that he noticed. Most of the guards were sticking close to a peculiar wagon. It was longer than the rest and he could see that it had some iron bars at the end. Was there some kind of animal in there that they were keeping from fleeing?

He also noticed a peculiar symbol on this wagon. He remembered seeing it somewhere before, he strained his head and finally recalled where he had seen it.

'Slave traders?'

It dawned on him, he had seen people having that symbol burned into their skin. It was a triskelion symbol which was a shape with three-fold rotational symmetry. This one was circular in shape with three dots on the inside of the triskelion spirals. It was a universal slave symbol and was the calling card of slave traders.

This world was one of war and strife. Things like slaves existed like any other things. There were various types of them, some of which were, war slaves, criminal slaves, and debt slaves.

Criminal slaves were people that were as the name stated, criminals. There were mostly robbers, killers, and thieves. Depending on the severity of their crimes they would be sentenced to a life of slavery.

War slaves were mostly just prisoners of war. Captured soldiers would be taken in as slaves after losing a skirmish or a war. Even high ranking nobles from another country could end up like this if they lost to another empire.

Debt slaves were people with massive debt. Depending on how much they accumulated and with who they could end up in slavery if they couldn't pay up. Sometimes people even sold their family members as collateral damage and they would be in this category.

In this world, a person wouldn't be able to easily escape after they were branded a slave. People would earn this title through trial by judge. This title would show up during identifications via skills or magical devices.

Most of the time it would be a lifelong sentence. The title would then stick with the person till the end of their life. There were certain ways of removing it, this mostly happened after a master was acquired. This person could then set the slave free after a small ritual.

The title didn't compel the slave to follow his or her master's orders. The person still needed to be kept in check. There were ways of doing it, the easiest way was by the use of slave collars. These devices came in various shapes and sizes. The slaves mostly wore them around their necks. There were also smaller versions like rings and bracelets.

The slave collars would give out electrical discharges to the person wearing them. These caused excruciating pain to the affected person and were activated by a slave owner's remote device. Some collars even added explosives that would cause instant death but were mostly reserved for the more dangerous offenders.

"Here you go, eat up!"

Roland was handed some stew by the husky looking lady. He just nodded with his head while thanking her and walked a bit to the side. Luckily no one had decided to talk to him and he could enjoy his meal in silence. It wasn't the greatest but it was better than the dried meat that he had with him.

While munching to the side he eavesdropped on some of the conversations that the people were having, mostly out of boredom.

"Heard the goods are a bit special this time around."

"Yeah, these ones will go for a steep price."

The ones talking were the guards from the slaver cart. Roland believed that these 'goods' that they were talking about were probably the slaves inside it. This also explained the iron bars but even without them, the slaves wouldn't get far if they had the slave collars on them.

The slavers had four wagons with them. Three for the slaves to be sold off and another one for the workers and soldiers. He was interested in these special 'goods' but not enough to snoop around. This was the reality of this world, he had to think about himself first and not others.

After eating up he decided to return to the back of the carriage cart. Some people set up tents while others just slept in sleeping bags out in the open. Roland had no tent and he would rather just lean against a crate with a blanket over himself than spend it outside.

The adventurers took turns on guard duty and the night went past without a problem. Roland didn't get in much sleep as always, he was still slightly stressed. During the bouts of sleeplessness, he just trained his mana reinforcement skill.

The journey continued, there was nothing in particular happening. On the second day the caravan suffered a small monster attack, some familiar looking boar monsters appeared. Roland didn't need to act, the adventurers were more than enough to handle this small beast attack. This even allowed the people to feast on some monster boar meat which was quite a delicacy in these parts.

After the show of strength, Roland started worrying less about the continued journey ahead. The people protecting them looked at least decent in their battles. Unless a large group of tier 2 monsters appeared they should be safe on their journey. They weren't traveling through lands with many powerful monsters so it seemed like the expedition to his new town would be uneventful.

The day turned into night and nothing out of the ordinary was happening. Roland continued to listen to the other people speak while training his new skill. He could feel that his mana was getting stronger with each passing day, unlocking the third level was on the horizon.

At about half mark of the journey, the caravan of wagons arrived at a mountain range. This was a winding path that stayed close to the cliffs with not much wiggle room. This was the part of the trek that Roland was worried about. One wrong step or a scared animal and someone could end up falling down the cliffs.

He broke off his mana reinforcement training and decided to stay vigilant. He still lacked any type of detection skill so he took out one of his runic devices. It was just a round piece of metal that was the size of an apple.

This was a common grade detection spell that he crafted. He placed it on a round piece of metal just so that he would get more uses out of it. It would slowly shrink after getting repaired but due to the thickness, it would last him for a while.

This item acted like a sonar, when he activated it he could see living creatures in a set radius. The more mana he inserted the further the range would expand. He gave it a try and activated the detection device but frowned the moment he did.

'There are too many people here...'

The device showed him a sort of holographic image with a lot of dots. These dots were people in near proximity while the device he was using was the middle part. When he activated it he just saw a large mass of blue dots crowding the whole space.

This item only had two colors, blue and red. Blue would be people of the races while red would be monsters. It was also tricky to tell if someone was above or below the user of this item as it only showed the glowing orbs on a flat surface.

'This is what I get for not testing it out in the field. It would probably work well in a dungeon corridor though...'

He shrugged while leaning back in the cart, he started periodically activating the item but the blue dots crowded the magical radar that had only about 50 meters of range.

They traveled higher and higher and were now reaching the top of this mountain. After reaching it they would just need to descend to reach the other side. After this, it would be smooth sailing to the port city. That is, if they made it...

Roland used his detection item once more and noticed something. He was counting the blue dots out of boredom and he noticed some more on the edges of this radar. He quickly did a double-take and could see the blue dots approaching.

At first he thought that maybe it was other merchants also using this route. That theory was quickly abolished by an arrow lodging itself into the wooden box he was leaning against.

"Bandits!"

Roland looked at his detection ball and wanted to toss it out of the wagon he was in. He quickly looked outside his cart and could see the adventurers and guards getting ready for a fight. The biggest problem was that the bandits had the high ground.

"Of course this would happen just when we were about to reach the top..."

He grimaced while grabbing his magical wand, he wasn't sure if the adventurers would be enough to take out these bandits. He might have to get his hands dirty.

[Chapter 58 New headache.](#)

Roland's body twitched as he felt cold. He began to slowly open his eyes while having a tough time remembering what happened.

He was instantly greeted by a splitting headache. His vision felt muddled and it took a couple of seconds for it to focus.

He found himself in an unfamiliar location if you could call it that. What he saw was an uneven ceiling that consisted of just rocks and dirt. The walls were uneven with bugs crawling on them, he was clearly in some kind of cave.

There was some light coming out from the side, probably the cave's entrance. Thanks to it he could barely see as he didn't possess any night seeing skills or abilities.

He felt terrible as if a stampede of horses ran him over. He knew that something was wrong and he needed to assess the situation. First, he checked if he was in any condition to fight. He did this by trying to stand up.

Luckily besides some bruises and a splitting headache, nothing was broken. There was a lack of bindings around his feet and arms so he felt like he wasn't captured by anything or anyone.

There was also the possibility that the person that brought him here didn't see him as a threat. It could be a tier 2 or tier 3 being that judged his danger level to be quite low.

He leaned back against the wall as his vision slowly started returning. He quickly looked to the side and found that his arming sword wasn't there. He had his wands and his bags of holding still on him which made him sigh out in relief.

Roland tried recalling what had transpired before he went unconscious. He remembered being in one of the wagons before a group of bandits attacked them. An arrow made its way through the cart he was in and landed on one of the boxes, then it all began and also when it all went wrong.

He jumped outside as the carriage stopped in its tracks. The way forward was blocked off and the bandits attacked. They were safely up on a faraway ledge above them and had an easy way to pelt them with more arrows.

Roland ducked behind the cart he was previously inside. It didn't have much protection on the inside as it only had a cloth covering the framing as a roof. Outside he could at least hide behind the undercarriage and also the boxes on the inside would stop the arrows from penetrating further in.

The hired adventurers and the guards sprung into action. They in a similar fashion tried blocking the arrow paths with the wagons and carts. Some of them had large shields and bows of their own to fire back.

There were more people on the caravan's side but at least half were non-combatants. People just traveling, merchants, and their families. This left the adventurers and the guards that came with the slave traders as the fighting force.

The bandits had prepared themselves for this ambush. They put up a barricade made from logs to block the way forward. There was also a group of men standing there with bows and crossbows. The way back was blocked off by them pushing large rocks down from the cliff above.

They had also brought some cover for themselves and could fire upon the caravan without the worry of getting hit themselves. Their thick wooden barricade above couldn't be pierced even by tier 2 archers that were amongst the adventurers.

It was clear that the bandits didn't want to take any prisoners. They encased them in a trap and would slowly whittle them down. They could probably blow them up with explosives if they wanted to, but they probably didn't want to damage the items they could plunder.

The adventurers and soldiers set up a defensive perimeter by pushing the carts together. They were only able to make a half-circle with nowhere to run.

They all were now high up in the mountains with a drop to their doom behind them. The fog was thick so they couldn't really tell what was down there. They all presumed that falling down was a one-way ticket to their afterlife.

Roland found himself next to a family of three. The child was crying in her mother's arms while the husband was to the side with a dagger in his hand. He didn't look like someone that knew how to handle such a tool. His hands were trembling and his eyes were darting between a few places.

Roland could identify these three people and clearly see their classes. The child had none, the father had a farmer class while the woman was a cook.

Classes like this existed, mostly they signified that the person that had it was unfit for combat. They failed to reach the threshold of achieving even the simplest class like warrior or archer. They were also more common than people might think.

The exchange continued for a while but soon enough the bandits switched to fire arrows and flammable cocktails. Some of the wooden carriages started burning along with the items inside. The biggest problem was on the slavers side as they had people on the inside.

Before things could get any uglier Roland decided to act. He had an option of either helping these people out or running away on his own. He didn't owe anyone anything here but he didn't feel like leaving defenseless children behind.

It would leave a distasteful taste behind in his mouth if he abandoned kids and women to just die. He felt that with a larger number of people there would be a bigger chance of survival. There was strength in numbers and nowhere to go but forward.

First, he used one of his runic scrolls to put out the fire on the carriages. The heat was pushing people away from the protective barricade. Which would then leave them open to arrow attacks.

He combined two spells, one to make water and another one to freeze it. First, the water splashed against the flames, then with the addition of the cold, the fire subsided. The people looked at him with surprise in their eyes as he wasn't part of the adventurers or the guards.

After putting out the fire Roland took out an orb of some sort. It looked like a tennis ball-sized sphere made from metal. He made his best baseball pitcher impression while throwing this ball at the bandits above them. It made a nice arc while going towards its target.

The bandits took notice of the spell caster among the caravan but it was a bit too late. They also noticed him throw something their way. This caused them to back away while putting up regular shields.

The ball of metal collided with one of those shields and just bounced off. It tumbled down and away from the bandits that looked at it curiously. It looked like Roland threw a round rock at them which caused more eyebrows to raise.

The men dropped their shields and were ready to return fire. It looked like the attack was a dud and they panicked for no reason. Before they could continue though they heard a strange sound.

The ball of metal then promptly exploded like a grenade. They were greeted by a small ball of fire and pieces of sharp metal. The metal caused widespread injuries while the explosion pushed them back.

This was an item that Roland made in his spare time. He combined both his runic craftsmanship along with his runic scrolls.

The metallic ball was hollow on the inside with a little slit through which he could fit a small version of a scroll in. Thanks to his condensation skill he was now able to miniaturize his scrolls even further.

The scroll was placed inside and he added runic parts to the ball. They mostly consisted of ethereal pathways so that he could activate it. So a runic grenade came to be. The moment it exploded the metal encasing that the runic scroll was in would go flying in all directions.

He had a couple of versions, some exploded within ten seconds some even faster. He used a more delayed version first to catch the people off guard. If it exploded too soon they might have defended themselves with their shields. He was banking on their curiosity getting the better of them and was rewarded for it.

He threw another grenade towards the bandits. One of them saw this and moved forward. The man saw the explosion from the side and realized what this item was. He also was thinking that he had enough time to deflect it. To his surprise, this orb exploded much sooner than the previous one.

The adventurers had tried using some of their own enchanted spell scrolls before. Yet the bandits shielding barricade and the mountain walls proved to be a good defense against them. The spells traveled in a straight line but Roland could throw his nades in an arch behind the enemy line to hit them.

The adventurers used this chance to fire off some arrows and bolts towards their enemies. Finally, the battle started shifting, even more after Roland unloaded his most powerful spell.

A large ball of condensed fire collided with the barricade and makeshift shielding that the bandits constructed above. This was a 'Fire Blast' spell empowered by Roland's large amount of mana.

It caused wide destruction to the robber's side and it looked like the people here would be getting out alive. Roland even managed to clear out part of the other barricade that was blocking the path forward. With his high mana pool, the runic spells that he could cast were many times stronger than if a regular person activated them.

The bandits were sore losers though. They still had the high ground and a plan B. This plan consisted of pushing massive boulders down below and causing a rockslide.

Just as the people were close to cheering they were pelted by rocks. The large stones crushed the carts and carriages and rolled forward.

Roland grasped his hurting head and felt that it had been bandaged up. He didn't remember much after that. The ensuing rockslide caused part of the people to fall down to the misty pit below. He only recalled putting up as many magic shields as he could on himself and the people next to him.

"I must have survived the fall and someone brought me here..."

Roland took out a healing potion from one of his bags and quickly drank it. He noticed that someone tried bandaging up some of his wounds but they did a poor job. It looked like the bandages were part of their clothes.

His weapon was missing, either it was taken by the person who patched him up or it was lost during the fall. He needed to get more information first, while getting himself together he moved towards the light.

He leaned against the walls a bit while slowly walking. The potion was slow working and his body was still aching. Before he could get outside he heard someone talking, he heard a man's voice and one that was more high pitched.

“Lady Aredhel we must move quickly, this is our chance to escape.”

“Logon, why did you take our savior’s weapon, return it, we should wait till he recovers his health.”

“But what if a monster appears or those bandits...”

Roland could hear the two arguing. The man was referring to the woman as ‘lady’ which made him think that she was some kind of noble.

‘Were there hidden nobles in the caravan?’

It was quite uncommon for nobles to travel in such a way. They would have their own luxury carriage and the protection of some knights. They wouldn’t travel along with merchants and commoners unless they were hiding from something or someone.

He couldn’t get much information from their conversation. The man wanted to leave along with his enchanted arming sword. The woman on the other hand wanted to wait for him to get better. The woman didn’t seem to be the problem but he needed to be wary of the man.

First, he needed to actually see what he was working with. While the two were busy arguing he pulled out his detection device and activated it. Due to fearing that the people would detect his mana he inserted the bare minimum of magic into his detector. This would shorten the distance of the scan but would be harder to detect.

From the image he could see that besides the two there was another person with them. He or she was a bit further away so he now knew how many potential enemies he had.

He had a couple of things he could do now. He could either wait it out, they might decide to leave instantly. He could also ambush them and try getting his sword back that the man was holding on to. The cave bent a bit so they couldn’t see him hiding here. He would probably have the element of surprise on his side.

Then the third option would be to just go out and talk. The woman didn’t seem to have any ulterior motives and she might be the one in charge. The man was probably her guard, he could judge him to be a threat and try attacking him though.

While he was thinking about what to do another option arose. It began with a familiar scream that he had heard so many times before.

“Goblins...”

Roland had killed so many of those little buggers that he could tell them apart from any other humanoid monster by the scream.

“Lady Aredhel, get behind me!”

It looked like a fight was breaking out, thanks to this Roland was able to stick his head out to see what he was working with. Just like he heard before he saw a man and a woman. They were similar looking to two people he had seen before.

They both had dark skin and long silver hair. They had the characteristics of moon elves and the long ears gave it away. What surprised Roland wasn't their race but what they were wearing.

The girl had a dirty looking white dress and no shoes. It looked to be ripped up in a couple of places. He instantly could tell that this ripped up dress were the bandages that were wrapped around his head.

The man also had simple clothes and was holding his arming sword with one hand while glaring at a mountain variant of a goblin. The most surprising part wasn't their haggard looks, no it was what they were wearing around their necks.

"Slaves?"

Roland mumbled to himself. The two clearly had slave collars around their necks. From what he knew these collars could be activated to send electricity down an unruly slave's body. some could even explode.

There was also another feature, it blocked the use of any active skills or mana circulation. Even if the moon elf man wanted to use his runic sword he wouldn't be able to.

He moved his neck out even more and looked to where the third person would be. The appearance of this person was also quite peculiar. His skin was light green and he looked to be over two and a half meters tall. His body was very muscular and also filled with wounds.

This person looked to be a Half-Orc. This race had a connection to the Orcs which were considered monsters. The Half-Orcs were considered smarter then their rage-filled relatives and also smaller. A true Orc would normally be half a head taller than this one.

Just like the two elves this person also had a collar around his neck. In his hand was a large makeshift club made from a thick tree branch. He was engaged in a battle with some goblins that were poking his legs with their spears. The half-orc looked to be having trouble in hitting the little buggers as they were nimble enough to back away from his range.

'Why does it always have to be goblins...should have used more mana with the radar.'

Roland grasped his magic wand and pointed it out of the cave. The monsters didn't notice him yet he could get a few free shots. He took aim at what seemed to be the strongest out of the bunch, a hobgoblin quite similar to the one he once slew.

He didn't have his traps nor did he have the high ground. His sword was in the hands of the elven man who couldn't even use it to its full potential. Luckily Roland had some other weapons stashed away with him, one was the heavy rapier that he had gotten all those years ago.

Roland concentrated and took aim, waiting for the right moment to attack. He needed to make this count. His mana was injected into his wand, his target being the spot between the goblin's eyes.