

Runesmith 113

[Chapter 113 Slow starts.](#)

Roland felt a little jittery this day. They had waited till almost the middle mark and the longer it took the more stressed he was. He had almost forgotten that his family could even be looking for him after all these years but now he was about to face one of their members.

His older brother Robert that he didn't really get along with was riding on the horse a bit behind an expensive-looking carriage. He was one of the accompanying knights that hailed from the Luxendarc Knight Academy.

It was clear to him by the design of the silvery armors that they were wearing. This was one of the more prestigious schools that a noble could attend. He was sure that Robert only studied there due to his father's involvement in the academy.

Wentworth his father like the members of the family before him had attended this very academy. The Arden house had produced many knights but only after his father rose to be the number one position in the academy did the name start gaining fame. There was a strict hierarchy the students followed and he managed to reign supreme.

Martha was the one that told him this tale. In it, Wentworth was painted as a heroic man that went through many missions given to him by envious nobles. All of them were jealous of his talents and wanted him to fail but he never faltered.

He achieved something that was quite rare, he raised his house name into a proper noble rank. Knights were somewhat considered to be nobles but they were mostly treated as mere soldiers.

If one of the parents was in the possession of the knight class the children would be able to pick this class later in life. Unless they went down the same path, the class would be lost to the third generation. This was also why parents usually pressured their children into becoming knights themselves.

Only if they were raised to official nobles could the class be passed down without a limit. The noble trait was a hidden title that was not seen by the system. People speculated that it was connected to the bloodlines and would be unlocked only when approved by other nobles in a given country. Higher noble titles could also sometimes unlock more prestigious classes.

Then there was the carriage, the name of this academy was Xandar's Institute of Wizardry. It was named by some old legendary wizard that lived many millennia ago. The two schools were in close proximity to each other. This was also probably the reason why these two institutions were working together on this expedition.

Roland knew this place quite well as he had researched it before his ascension ritual threw a wrench into his plan. If he had normal elemental affinities he would have probably been attending classes at that very academy for young mages.

Fate worked in strange ways, he was now looking at the two academies that he might have been a member of. If he had stayed behind he would certainly be stuck in the school that Robert was about to finish.

The adventurers that were walking towards the dungeon were forced to the side by the many knights. They were all together which allowed Roland to count.

“Twenty greenhorn knights and two young girls that probably haven’t even seen a goblin before...”

Next to him, Silvio was leaning against a tree. He as the others weren’t looking that favorably at this group of nobles. Roland understood well where they were coming from, the mission was pushed back by more than a whole day.

Having to wait without anything to do was not how these adventurers liked spending their time. Roland could have easily crafted some runic equipment in this time and gained some experience. Instead, he was stuck rechecking his equipment without anything else to do but to wait.

“Everyone wait here, I’ll go talk to our young lordlings.”

Slowly everyone started to get up, Korgak had to be woken up with a smack to the head by Armand. This drunkard was probably the best-rested team member as within the first half-hour of waiting he had fallen asleep on the rough ground.

“Isn’t that helmet a bit stuffy?”

Roland’s attention was brought to the side, Lobelia was there. She was in the process of stretching out as she had also succumbed to drowsiness.

“No, I’m fine...”

Due to the danger of his brother recognizing him, Roland was sure to never remove this helmet out in the open. Even he instantly recognized Robert even after not seeing him for over six years. It was very likely that his brother would be able to do the same.

“If you say so, I’ll be counting on you!”

The girl shrugged while also for some reason giving him a smack on the shoulder. He didn’t really budge from his spot and instead, he could see the half-elven girl’s hand become a bit red.

“Ah sure...”

Due to how the party formation was set up he would be handing out with Lobelia in the back.

“Woof!”

“You too, you cutie!”

Agni’s mouth was opened soon as Lobelia started rubbing him behind the ears. Roland was surprised that his Ruby Wolf opened up to someone so quickly. The girl seemed to have a knack for talking to tamed monsters and Agni was clearly enjoying the scratches.

While the girl was playing around with the pooch Roland took his time in examining the noble party from afar. Most of the members were young adults, after some quick scans with his analyzing skill he could tell that they were mostly at the onset of the tier 2 knight class. They were mostly split between the Shield Knight and Sword Knight class, which Robert was part of.

All of his brothers like him were forced to master every weapon type that was used by a knight class. This was all for the sole purpose of easy advancement in the future. Most would focus on both of these variants which would unlock the 'High Knight' class. There were also harder variations that would unlock the 'Crusader' or 'Knight Champion' classes instead.

There was one person that was above all of them when it came to levels and strength though. His armor looked bulkier and he was the only knight with a nice blue cape attached to his shiny plate mail armor.

'That guy must be their commanding officer.'

Silvio was in the process of talking to this man. He was clearly past his forties and also a tier 3 class holder. Roland couldn't really see his stats due to the difference in levels. His identification skill still was lacking levels to allow him to peek on everyone's status screen. The only thing he could somehow tell was that his level was close to Silvio's.

'Probably a High Knight, don't think they would let anyone with a more prestigious class be an instructor at a Knight academy.'

Roland knew that even though this man's level was high, he couldn't be counted on during combat. This instructor would prioritize the noble children instead of the adventurers. He would probably focus on the two noble ladies that were now coming into view.

'That one is a frost magician?'

First, he saw a young girl with long blue hair stepping out of the carriage. She was wearing a somewhat light-looking dress. It was white with a skirt that went down to her knees. Her feet were covered by long boots that also went up to about knee height.

The upper part of this robe was form-fitting around the chest area but became looser around her arms. In one hand she was holding a large staff with a large blue crystal. This crystal was clearly a type of mana stone that would lower her casting requirements.

The second person that stepped out from the carriage was also a girl, her hair quite blond. She was wearing a similar robe but the staff she had had a more brownish stone embedded in it.

'That one seemed to specialize in earth spells.'

Frost was clearly the weakness of fire elemental monsters but the reverse was also true. Earth would be the better option as it took quite the temperature to melt hardened stone into lava. It looked like the two mages put some thought into picking a fire-type dungeon for their mission. A frost magician would come in handy, a simple spell that lowered the temperature could cause some of the fire monsters to suffer quite a bit. The volcanic salamanders for instance were quite susceptible to these sorts of spells.

On the other hand, a frost magician would find it hard to create their spells and concentrate with a high concentration of fire elements in the air. Thus it was a double-edged sword. It depended on the strength of the magician. She would be able to deal more damage but casting would become difficult.

'Either she is confident in her spells or she is underestimating the difficulty...'

Roland with his runic spells could circumvent the casting difficulty. He didn't need to concentrate much, inserting his mana into the premade structure was the only thing he needed to worry about.

The two ladies were wearing various accessories like necklaces, rings, and earrings. Even from here, he could tell that they were all magical tools that probably either increased their mana capacity or spell power.

There was a certain lack of mana stones on most of those accessories. They were clearly crafted with the help of the manufacturing knowledge that he was hoping to get after this expedition was over.

Unless he got his hands on that he would be forced to attach bulky mana stones to his creations. This would pose a problem later on, as these monster crystals only increased in size with the strength of the monsters they came from.

While Roland was glancing at the two young ladies from afar Silvio finally returned.

“Okay listen up people, we will be clearing up the path for the nobles. All the way up to the boss room, it’s time to earn our keep.”

Apparently, the nobles weren’t interested in killing the lower-level monsters. From Roland’s perspective, they wanted to conserve their strength before the tier 2 monsters arrived. The first one they were going to be battling would be the 10th level boss that he faced. With so many knights and two tier 2 mages even if it was the Ruby Golem, they would probably survive.

“Agni, stay close to Sister Kassia, your job is to protect her if something happens.”

Roland pointed to the nun from the church that was in the middle of the party’s formation. Agni gave out a bark and quickly moved to his position.

“Oh my, what a gallant protector.”

The nun chuckled while looking down at the Ruby Wolf. His tail was swinging side to side while he was striking a pose.

“Wayland, I heard from the guild master that you can give us magical support from the back.”

“Hm? Sure.”

Roland nodded while taking out something from his own backpack. It was a long metal rod with a large blue crystal at the very top. There were also some smaller mana stones embedded on the rod’s shaft to lower the mana usage.

This was a runic staff of his own making. It was mostly straight with the top part looking like a hawk’s claw holding the large mana stone in place. Roland didn’t give this weapon any gimmicks or detachable parts. It had a couple of spells engraved into the spell structure that thanks to his basic knowledge of the runic code could be activated at will.

It worked in similar fashion to the arming sword design that he made before. It was a more advanced version that would allow his spells to be activated faster. The only downside to this was the thick and heavy design he had to go with. This was mostly to save up on runic corrosion and so that he had a lot of material to perform repairs later.

Due to this, the staff wasn't really something another magic caster would find a use for. Roland had a high strength stat all things considered while most mages had meager gains in that regard. The heavy weight would also allow him to use it as a weapon if he ever needed it.

"Here keep it safe..."

"Leave it to me!"

Roland handed his backpack to a certain person wearing a large backpack. It was even larger than the one Bernir was stuck wearing. This person was a regular human and a steel grade adventurer that was hired as one of the porters for this party. The nobles had some of these carriers following them around with large spatial backpacks as well.

This person was not really part of this party but would be staying with them in their encampment. A steel grade adventurer was entrusted with this mission instead of a regular porter as they were going down into the lower levels. Mostly people that lacked combat classes took on these types of jobs that paid less than what a proper adventurer could earn.

Because of the dangers below the 10th level, the notion of regular porters was abandoned. Roland knew this so he didn't even ask if Bernir could come along.

The young man that was coming with them was slightly older than he was. He was in his second tier 1 class. His first one was the usual scout class while the one he had now was archer. He looked to be mostly specked into agility and would have no problem of running away if things got too dangerous.

With everyone finally ready it was time to descend into the Dungeon below. His party with Silvio in the front was awaiting further instructions. Before heading down they had to wait for the nobles to get information as well. With Roland being directly in the back he would be the closest to the knights in the front.

Luck was really not on his side as the further most knight just had to be his older brother Robert. He, like most of the other knights, was wearing silvery half-plate armor. There were two people from the group with more extravagant-looking gear. First was the tier 3 High Knight instructor and the second one was a handsome young man with golden hair and blue eyes.

'Is that the commander of the knight unit?'

Just like his adventurer party, the nobles had some kind of commander in their unit. A person like this had to be someone from a well-off noble house and also be quite skilled to get this position. At this moment the lady that had the earth elemental staff was walking next to this man and blushing.

'Would be nice if they stopped flirting and we could get this over with...'

He and the others arrived early in the morning but these nobles had gotten here about fifteen minutes ago. It was clear that they didn't care if they made the commoners wait. Roland just gave out a sigh and turned in the opposite direction. One of the reasons was boredom while the other was his brother. The less both of them interacted the better.

"Oh...OH! What is this!"

While minding his business he felt someone approach from the back. At first, he ignored the callouts as he thought that the nobles were talking to each other. Soon he felt someone poke the back of his armor, the voice clearly belonged to a woman.

“Where did you find this... these runic structures are so well made... did a master craftsman fashion this for you?”

“Huh?”

Roland turned around to notice the blue-haired lady mage standing really close to him. He looked down at her as she was more than a head shorter than him.

“Lady Lucille please be careful!”

Robert quickly appeared like a lightning bolt and moved his hand between the two. Roland took a step back while being surprised. The noble lady instead of listening to Robert continued to look at his runic items while her eyes shone like bright blue moons.

“I see that the noble lady has a keen eye!”

For some reason, Lobelia that was next to Roland decided to talk. She clearly had no problem speaking up even in front of a noble.

“You might not know this, but Wayland here made this all by himself! He is a very famous runesmith with more talent than even the dwarven smiths!”

Roland tried glaring at Lobelia but due to wearing his helmet, this was unnoticed. Instead, Lobelia gave him a thumbs-up as if she thought that she was helping him strike some deal with these nobles here.

“This sir is a Runesmith? I have dabbled a bit into runecraft but I haven’t seen such a unique runic composition before, is this some kind of new spell?”

The young girl became quite chatty while Roland remained silent. The biggest problem remained his brother Robert that was giving him the stink eye. Luckily for him, the blond man that was the commander decided to walk over.

“Lady Lucille, please don’t inconvenience the adventurers.”

The moment the young man called out to this young lady Roland could see an instant reaction.

“Ah... Lord Percival... I apologize, I shall return with haste.”

The young woman was quick to go back while evading this man’s sharp gaze. Roland wasn’t sure what this was about but was glad that this man could exert control over this girl.

“You, return to your post.”

Robert wasn’t even graced with a name as Lord Percival ordered him to get back. Finally, everyone got into their designated spots and it was time to descend below ground.

[Chapter 114 Knights in a dungeon.](#)

A group of annoyed adventurers was standing outside the Albrook Dungeon. They had to stop as a large group of knights forced them to remain behind. They surrounded the whole entrance and were keeping people from going in or even from coming out.

The thought of going over and pushing through never crossed their mind. The noble crests were a clear indication of trouble. No person with an inkling of intelligence would ever involve themselves with nobles unless it was work-related. Without much to do, some decided to wait while others listened in, curious about the meaning of them being here.

“Lord Percival, you may start.”

“Thank you Sir Bertold, I will do my best to finish this mission with haste.”

They could see two men in full body armor talk to each other. One was old while the other quite handsome and young. After the little talk that the two had with each other it seemed that something was happening.

“Everyone get in formation, we will be descending into the dungeon. Follow after the adventurer scouting party!”

With that order given the people could see a party of adventurers entering into the dungeon. There were some unknown members in this party but some people recognised Armand and the crimson armor of a certain person that was gaining notoriety.

“Interesting... that guy is also part of this...”

A shadowy figure whose face was mostly covered commented from the side. He and a few of his party members were sitting in some shade while examining the situation.

“Is something wrong?”

“Don’t know... it might be a gig... I’ll have go ask my contacts to be sure...”

“Oh?”

The robed man started rubbing his chin while grinning. His eyes followed the large armored man in red and how not far from him the noble knights descended into the dungeon as well.

Back in the dungeon Roland and everyone had taken up their positions with their porter hanging out in the middle. Whenever the fighting started he was tasked to search for cover and hide.

All of the party members here were silver grade so the dungeon monsters that were below the 50th level didn’t prove much of a challenge. They were more annoying than anything and mostly fell to Lobelia’s arrows. Roland let the fighting up to their two warriors in the front without wasting any runic spells.

Armand and Korgak were actually quite proficient at taking out any monsters that they came across. The half-orc’s weapon of choice was something that looked like a very large cleaver. It only took one swing of his weapon to kill a monster that came his way. Armand on the other hand used his hands, the monsters were either smacked away into a pulp or thrown to the side where they were finished off by Silvio or Lobelia.

'Don't really have anything to do here...'

Roland was somewhat relaxed while not having anything to do. Agni on the other hand was gaining some experience from finishing some lower-level creatures. His level had risen to 32 but he had a long way to go till his tier 2 evolution.

He knew that if he showed the shortcuts they would be able to cut the travel time dramatically. However, he decided to keep this secret for himself. It was better to have an escape route for himself that no one else could follow in case of unforeseen circumstances. Even though there was a low chance of betrayal, it was better to be safe than sorry.

"Damn those knights are slow... what's taking them so long?"

Lobelia commented from the side while pulling out her arrow from a less evolved salamander-type monster's head. They all were seasoned adventurers that had gone through dungeons since a young age. The knights on the other hand were rarely forced to travel through tight corridors like this maze.

Roland attributed their slow-moving speed to a few things. One was their choice of armor that in a volcanic region like this was mostly a liability. Without something to lower the temperature someone with heavy armor would become fatigued quite fast. Due to this they had to make some stops and have their frost mage cast a cooling spell from time to time.

The second problem were those lady mages. They were clearly not used to long expeditions into unknown regions. Roland was sure that their physical stats were not much better than a tier 1 warrior. With low endurance they would need constant stops and the heat would only get worse with time.

"It's fine, Sister Kassia can use a break as well."

"Oh, I'm quite fine thanks to Mr. Wayland here."

Silvio called out to the nun that replied. Roland was just standing there while waving that large magical rod of his. From time to time he would produce a chilling effect to make it more comfortable for the party. Thanks to it being a runic spell there was no waiting time and he could do it easily while walking.

"Wayland, want to come party with us after we are done with this mission?"

Lobelia nodded, Roland could see that she was serious. He only started doing it after he noticed some of his party members sweating. This section of the dungeon wasn't that hot but when some salamanders showed up the temperature always increased. The dungeon wasn't that well ventilated so fighting a fire-based creature always made it uncomfortable to be in.

"I'll think about it..."

He replied while not really thinking that it would be such a good idea. Bernir and Agni were enough as he was able to maximize on his experience gain. The other problem was the person he was looking at, he certainly didn't want to work with a certain punch crazy brute. The only reason he took this mission were the costly crafting schematics he wanted.

"I'll take that as a yes, oh they caught up!"

Lobelia answered while notching an arrow into her bow once more. Roland glanced at this arrow for a moment and started wondering if he could add a runic effect to it. Regretfully without the proper wood, it would be impossible. The only other option would be a fully metallic arrow which costs outweigh its uses.

‘Maybe if we find one of those ash trees in the lower levels I could actually make some...’

They descended down while Roland thought about what he would do for the weeks they were there. At the moment they had some work to do but after getting to the second level they would be nothing more than lookouts.

What would normally take a couple of hours turned to eight as they finally arrived at the 10th level of the dungeon and were now right before the boss chamber. A group of angry adventurer’s greeted Silvio that could only apologize for taking so long.

The adventurers here were task to block the dungeon chamber from being cleared out. This of course led to some pushback from the other adventurers but they could do nothing more than wait.

‘They must have paid quite a bit for this offer... the longer this chamber isn’t cleared the more money the guild loses.’

While Roland contemplated on the noble’s deep pockets the battalion of knights arrived soon after. He moved himself to the side as one of the first people here was Robert. Their first task was over now, the ones going inside would be the nobles first and they would remain in the back. This would be their first test, to beat the 10th level boss monster.

The knights looked slightly tired but they were still tier 2 class holders. Their high physical stats would allow them to somehow recover in a short amount of time. On the other hand, the two mage ladies were not looking that well.

Roland could tell with the help of his mana sense skill that they were using some cooling effects even at this very moment. Even when not affected by the heat that much they still looked tired. There was no way to fit the carriage into this dungeon which forced everyone to walk.

The constant usage of mana to run magical trinkets was also probably taking a toll on them. The two more than likely had lower amounts of mana than him and not many classes had skills that lowered the mana usage when using magical items as his did.

“Heh, are those two okay? Maybe they need to take a cold bath.”

Lobelia and Armand were to the side smirking a bit. Roland noticed that these two didn’t seem to like these nobles that much. They constantly commented on their slow pace. It seemed like there was some bad blood here but that was quite the common occurrence.

Most commoners either feared or disliked their noble overlords for one reason or another. Finding a common person that favored a noble was like finding a rainbow unicorn. Which was a creature that actually existed in this world.

“Lady Charlene, Lady Lucille how do you fare?”

“It’s so stuffy in here, someone give me some water!”

The blond lady called out to one of the knights that quickly brought over a water bottle.

“You expect me to drink from this?”

She glared at the poor knight that shrunk back, luckily for him, the blue-haired lady was quick to take the bottle of water and pour it into a proper glass container.

“Lucille, you’re too lenient with these knights!”

Charlene took the glass and started to slowly sip from it which put the whole expedition on hold. Though the moment the commander walked over the haughty look disappeared from this young woman’s face.

“We need to continue, please get ready we will be entering the boss chamber. I need both of you to be prepared for battle, I’ll be counting on your support.”

“Lord Percival, I’ll do my best!”

Roland rolled his eyes while looking from the side. The person called Charlene was quick to act like a little puppy when the correct person was in the picture. He could see Armand and Lobelia scoffing from the side as well.

“Get ready, we will be going in after the knights.”

Silvio walked over to give some orders. Roland took this time to ask a question.

“Will we need to get involved in the boss fight?”

“We are to standby and watch, only when the knight formation crumbles will we act, prioritize the mages and that blond noble over the others.”

Roland and the others nodded. They were aware of the power dynamics in that noble party. The only important people that they were actually contracted to bring out alive were the two women and the noble called Percival. The rest were expendable knights that were in a situation similar to Robert’s.

This was the harsh reality of the boundaries between status. Robert and the others were placed very low on the pecking order. They were either bastard sons with no way of getting the rights to their estate, regular knights, or one of the many sons from a baron’s estate. If he was there, he too would be quite expendable.

“Get ready, they are going in.”

The knights took up an arrow formation with their shields raised and pushed through the boss chamber door. Following behind them were a smaller group of knights that surrounded the two mages along with their commanding officer. Behind them was Roland’s party and the man named Sir Bertold.

This was quite the number of people going in. It shouldn’t be that hard to clear up the boss chamber with so many tier 2 class holders here. Even a Ruby Golem that he faced would be unable to combat so many knights and two mages that gave them fire support.

The only problem that Roland had in this composition was the lack of scout-like classes. They only had heavy warriors and two mages. They lacked the fire support a class like an archer could give them and

had to rely on the mage's large spells. These spells packed more destructive power than an arrow but were also less accurate. Accidents did sometimes happen, so the knights would receive residual damage from the mage spells.

"A pack of volcanic wolves?"

The platform was the same as before and on it was a small group of monster wolves. There were four regular volcanic wolves at level 50 with a slightly larger one in the middle that was level 60.

"Woof!"

"Calm down Agni, this isn't your fight."

The wolves were somewhat similar to Agni but instead of rubies, they were covered in hard volcanic rock. Their paws were mostly covered in this volcanic rock with some fissures. These cracks were glowing with some kind of red energy that looked like hot magma. They were also adults and a bit larger than Agni's adolescent form.

They were all waiting for their opponents to arrive. For the time being the group of knights was slowly moving forward on one of the pathways that connected to the center platform. His party and the others had just entered the boss chamber and the door behind them slammed shut.

With this also the pathway they were all standing on started sliding towards the platform the monsters were on. There was no turning back as behind them only molten lava awaited.

There was enough time for them to move forward but the party of Knights was moving sluggishly. They seemed a bit unorganized, some of them probably surprised after seeing the molten rocks below.

"Are those guys okay?"

Lobelia asked after seeing the group of knights clash against the tier 2 monsters. To someone not versed in monster fighting, it would be hard to spot a problem but a seasoned adventurer could see it.

"They are hesitating too much..."

Silvio added from the side while preparing his own bow.

'They do feel a bit sluggish, this heat takes a bit to get used to.'

Roland had to agree with Silvio on this one. The knights were successfully defending against the five Volcanic Wolves with their shields but were slow to counterattack. Then there were the two mages that had a hard time delivering a finishing blow.

These wolves were fast on their feet, the long casting times were the biggest downside to the mages battle tactic. After performing the spell they needed to guide the attack not to where the enemy was but to where they thought it would move to. For a short while this was also a problem for Roland when he was training with his own spell casting.

'Oh?'

It seemed that finally, the mages thought out some kind of strategy. The blond girl finished up a spell that didn't target the monsters but instead softened the ground under them which caused their legs to slide in. After this effect subsided the ground hardened up which left two of the wolves stationary.

'I guess they did teach them something at the academy.'

Following this, a spear of ice pierced through one of the monsters before it could free itself. Then the second wolf received a stab from Robert that was close by. With one monster down and another one injured the battle continued.

The battle was quite boring to watch, the knights were efficient and their commander used his troops to slowly encircle the remaining wolves. There were far too many enemies for these five monsters to come out on top and soon they found themselves with many stab wounds.

"Is it over? I almost fell asleep..."

Armand was down on the ground just sitting with his finger up his nose. Korgak next to him doing exactly the same thing.

The battle was won with the last monster succumbing to their wounds after a long battle. After it was all over the usual chest appeared but before they could peek inside it a little commotion came to light.

"What is the meaning of this, why did you leave your position?"

Robert stood with a red cheek that was smacked by his commander. Apparently, he had broken formation during the time he stabbed one of the wolves. To Roland, it looked like the right thing to do as the monsters weren't much of a challenge for these knights. The person called Percival didn't see it this way, he was probably the one who thought this defensive tactic was the best way to proceed.

"What if one of them made it through and one of the ladies got hurt!"

"I..."

Robert was seen slumping his shoulders forward while dropping his head. After some more scolding, he could see his half-brother walking away with his fist clenched. He had earned guard duty for the first night due to not following orders.

The chest was holding some kind of low-quality magical dagger that one of the knights took away. Soon the path towards the lower level was open and the expedition continued....