

Runesmith 309

Chapter 309: Tier 3 Trial Part 5.

Time continued to tick as Roland gathered all the books about warfare that he could find in the city. He had even made a trip to the black market and the auction house to see if there was something interesting to be gotten there. To no surprise, the only worthwhile material was at Arthur's mansion and with his help, he was able to acquire all the basics and some more intricate books. There was a lot to go through and not everything was correct, even though something was made into a book it didn't mean that no mistakes were made during its creation.

When going through all this knowledge he started recalling some strategies from the scriptures he unearthed in the old Arden estate library. It wasn't that he had forgotten it all, he just needed a little jolt to help him gain it back. Even with the stress resistance skill it wasn't that easy to recall what people before him went through. Now he felt slightly more confident in tackling the trial again.

"It's taking a while, it has already been more than a week..."

While sitting at his research table he looked at the crystal in his hand. Even though he was ready to give it another try it wasn't activating. This didn't bode well for him as the longer the first reset period was the harder it would become to retake the test again. To his knowledge doubling the time between tries was what usually happened but there were exceptions. It was possible for it to triple or perhaps even quadruple. This had already taken more than a week, nine days to be precise.

"Hm... I can feel something, wouldn't this make it ten days on the clock?"

Roland finally noticed that the crystal was resonating with his touch. He had stayed up to late at night as this was the exact same hour that he had come back from the trial space. This meant that it took precisely two hundred and forty hours for the reset to occur.

"So if it doubles for the next one, I'll have to wait for twenty days? If it triples for forty and then..."

His mind was filled with a long time frame, a setback that he didn't want to imagine. It was possible that it could even take one or two months for his third try or perhaps even longer. He wouldn't really know unless he tried but it was clear that if he failed for the third time, the timeframe would start to become troubling and at that point, it wouldn't be strange to pick the lesser option that was the High-Lord class.

This wasn't anything out of the ordinary, most people that attempted tier 3 class changes failed on the first attempt. They failed even with the easier classes so Roland's first failure could be excused by his inexperience. Time was a resource that he had painfully learned in the current trial. If it continued for too long and he was unable to clear this hurdle it would have been better to lower the difficulty.

"I'd have to take into account that the High-Lord class could have an entirely different trial and that I might also fail it at first..."

Roland wasn't sure what the cut-off point would be but he needed to calculate everything. If the reset period started to turn into multiple months it would get incredibly dangerous. Even though he wasn't focusing on it for now, there was something in the air. Arthur didn't say anything but it was obvious that there was something happening in the background. It wouldn't be strange if he didn't have more than a month to perform this change if he wanted to safeguard this home that he built for himself.

“I just won’t fail again...”

He was not really a stranger to failure, it actually happened on almost a daily basis. His craftsmanship was still not the best and he was still deficient in some segments of his craft. The situation he was in now was practically due to multiple deficiencies, one of the main ones being his propensity to run away when things started going wrong. It was a miracle that he was able to keep himself from leaving this place already. Without becoming used to the people around and growing some tighter bonds he would have probably left a long time ago.

In his right hand, he had the crystal that would let him back into the trial area. In his left hand, he had a large mug filled with some leftover tea that he had just drunk. On the side, it had his name on it, and while the mug didn’t look all too great it had a lot more sentimental value to Roland. It had been given to him by Elodia as he had continued to use her set whenever she started hanging around his house. Now it was a part of their history that he was unwilling to throw away.

“Let’s go, I’ve learned all that I can.”

It was time to go back to it, all the books about leading troops that he could find were read and all the skills that were useful continued to be leveled up. Perhaps it would have been better to wait a few months and do more research but the foreboding feeling didn’t go away. Roland felt that if he failed this trial again that there would be terrible repercussions. His vision quickly faded and he appeared back in the old apartment complex, without waiting he made his way up to activate the trial that he had failed.

“It’s still there.”

He dreaded the moment of opening up the PC as there was a chance that the class could have vanished. While he didn’t have anything to base his fears on, when he saw the Runesmith Overlord class there, he let out a sigh of relief. In this fake space, Roland had a bit more time to think everything over as time worked differently. It took a few moments for him to gather the courage but soon enough he found himself in a familiar storage area like before.

‘Will it be the same?’

From the information that he had gathered, usually, the trials remained quite similar after failing them once. Some were identical while others changed a few things around. After going up through a similar set of stairs he realized that he was in the former type.

“My Lord!”

‘It’s close to the previous one but the layout is slightly off...’

The pupped Aid looked the same as he remembered him. Luckily his memories of the beginning part of this test were still vivid in his mind. He could recall all that he did and also his decision of going with the defensive strategy. The fort was quite similar to the old one but there were some minor differences. The wooden log walls appeared to be wider on one side than what he remembered. There was also a change in the topography of the region with the forest area changing with the mountain region where he found the iron mine and built the quarry.

“My Lord, there is no time to waste, we must prepare!”

“Yes yes, the Kindlings are coming.”

“Kindlings? No my lord!”

“Oh? Not the Kindlings, what is our enemy called this time around?”

“It’s the dreaded Lumberlings!”

“...”

While the name of his opponents changed the scenario was playing out the same. He had the exact same time left before they would be arriving and this time this group would be coming from a different location. His faction retained its Timberling naming sense but it seemed that the map was procedurally generated by this trial system, just like in some strategy games.

Roland theorized that this was done so that the person taking the trial wouldn’t be able to keep to the old strategies if they retained some information from their previous test. The name Lumberlings sounded familiar and it was a faction that he encountered later in his previous attempt. After hearing their name uttered by the Aid some of the past flashed in his mind.

Before the Aid could continue talking Roland quickly ran into the fort throne room where he couldn’t be followed. The console on the big wooden chair was still there and he could quickly select the production of the stable along with scout units. Perhaps he had lost the previous trial but it didn’t mean that he had been mistaken about every tactic. Getting together more information about the area around his fort was paramount to his victory.

Then there was his small army of fifty men. This was probably the most mismanaged part of his previous tactic. He wasn’t sure what he had done with them but he had some flashes of having a lot of archers. Considering that he was going for a defensive bastion, ranged weaponry would have been the way to go. Together with the magic turrets, it would have been quite a difficult formation to break. He was at least sure that he managed to hold out all the way until one faction conquered all the others.

This was the crux of his failure and needed to be taken into consideration. First of all, he could not let his men remain stationary in this fort, the moment the scouting unit was made they needed to be ready to move. At the start of this trial existed many smaller settlements with their own population and fortifications. They needed to be conquered by him in some way to not allow them to fall into the hands of the enemies.

Sooner or later one of his enemies would tip the scale and become undefeatable by the other NPCs. There were ways for tackling this issue, the basic one would be to just meet them in battle out on the field. If he managed to defeat their armies, then it would be over. However, the biggest issue with that plan was leaving himself up to being invaded by others. In his previous attempt, he overused all his defensive strategy knowledge and had been defeated. If he put everything into the offense this time around, failure would probably be right around the corner.

‘Everything needs a balance, I need to capture new settlements, make them into my own and protect them so they can generate more resources. I just need to find a good balance between the two...’

This was the key to his victory, equilibrium. His first mission which would be identical to the trial from beforehand was a good example. He had used up a week’s time just to walk all over the weak troops of

the Kindlings. There was no need for him to make all those explosive traps or that many runic arrow tips. There was so much more he could have done with that time instead and this was his current objective, winning the first defensive battle with minimal effort and with a lesser engagement of his troops.

Now that the time came, he needed to make his first big decision. His soldiers needed their weapons and certain ones were better than others. In this world where people could be divided by classes a person obviously went for the weapon they had skills in. Giving spears to swordsmen would do them no good but was a swordsman even a good class in a war setting? In Roland's opinion, there were a few types of soldiers that excelled in this type of setting and they were ones proficient in using polearms.

There were several types of pole weapons, like a poleaxe or the more famous halberd. However, in the current state of his army, he decided to go for something that was cheaper to manufacture as it could be hammered out of just one piece of metal. His weapon of choice for his soldiers would be the guisarme or a billhook which were similar to each other.

It was possible to evolve his soldiers into Polearm users that covered a plethora of these weapons that varied in shapes and sizes. It was possible to go with a specialized class like a Guisarmier or Halberdier but they would become locked into these roles. These would be better suited for his commander units that would level up faster than the others.

'Polearms are better than swords in an open field and are easy to make, greatswords aren't bad either though so I can equip a few swordsmen with those. After gaining enough resources I can switch the bills into poleaxes or what was that thing's name... oh right, Bec de corbin, think they don't call it like this here though.'

"Transporting them through the field won't be hard either... when I get enough resources I can start making shields and bows too..."

While a lot of names aligned with the one back at his home, some didn't pass over. The Bec de corbin was also a polearm but could also work as a war hammer on one side. It could pierce through things like a spear, had a spike in the back and a hammer in the front, a true multi-purpose weapon that could go very well with his polearm regiment. It even came equipped with a disc guard that was quite good for defensive purposes.

A polearm like a poleaxe was still designed to work along armor and against armor. In the beginning stages perhaps going with something like a spear would have been better as they were even easier to manufacture. Considering that he needed to plan for the future it was better to invest in something that would elevate his soldiers in future fights. Considering later on it would become harder and harder to level the army, it was better to start out now while his enemies were still weak.

The store and the blacksmith only offered very basic designs of the spear. This meant that Roland would have to use his time in fashioning the new weapon type by himself. Previously he would have thrown the notion of making new weapons away quickly. Instead, he would create more mines or exploding arrows for the coming siege. This time around, he decided to focus on preparing some better weapons for the future.

His soldiers could gain skills and levels in two ways, one was training at the barracks and the other going into battle. The former was the faster option but it also carried a risk with it. The moment a unit died it

would never be recovered and he would need to train a new soldier just like in real life. This was however when this shifted into a slightly more game-like system. If he met some conditions he could train better soldiers to suit the new weapons, this was also one of the reasons he was going to make a billhook and other pole weapons.

'This I at least remember, after a while I should be able to train soldiers from level fifty and they will be able to use weapons that had been previously made. This trial really just sees the soldiers as another resource and I guess to win this thing, I might have to do the same.'

A General couldn't fear losing his forces and luckily for Roland, his people looked like wooden puppets. Perhaps if he had to send actual people to die for him, he would not be able to make the hard decisions. Luckily in this kind of setting where the people were replaced by wooden men, he would not get any nightmares even if they got slaughtered by his enemies.

Thus time continued to fly as he got to work. The scout was used to examine the surrounding lands around the wooden fort. As before the quarry was established along with all the other basic buildings. The time that he had previously spent on making all the exploding arrows was minimized as he intended to deal with the attack in a different way. Most of the resources were instead pushed into equipping forty of his soldiers. These were sent to the nearest settlement that was easy pickings.

Roland had realized that the first 'tutorial' siege was nothing more than a distraction. There was no need to over-prepare for it. Wasting time on making all those explosive arrows and mining the entire area could have been avoided. Making good use of the army he had was paramount and would help him achieve victory. He was the focus of the enemy invaders and together with ten archers, he was enough to defend against this cannon fodder army.

'Hm... those Lumberlings had a slightly different shade but the composition of their forces is about the same, good...'

"My Lord, please reconsider!"

"It's fine, I'm more than enough to take them on, this will actually be quite educational, I have not faced so many enemies at once before, just have the archers pick off the stragglers and leave the main gate to me."

"But my lord..."

The wooden aid was almost crying as Roland grabbed a shield and something that looked like a reinforced club. This was his current plan, with the difference in the levels of his opponents there was no reason not to just battle them by himself. Even though it was two hundred against one he was much stronger than his enemies and besides his physical stats, there was also runic magic involved.

'I hope those guys will be enough to capture that settlement while I deal with these training dummies, it all starts now...'

Chapter 310: Tier 3 Trial Part 6.

'They are susceptible to flames at least...'

Roland had decided to face the small army of Lumberlings that had replaced the Kindlings that were in the first trial. The only flames coming from these wooden puppets were the ones that he had fashioned himself. By foregoing the old strategy of placing mines everywhere and spending days crafting explosive arrows he was able to be a boss-level threat out on the field.

First of all, he saved a lot of time by not needing to bumble around the settlement and just staying in the throne chamber. There like a proper lord, he could give out orders by clicking the interactive menu while previously he even visited all the buildings to see what they were for. All the resources were now allocated and his city was growing just like before but with his spare time, he was able to gather more iron and actually prepare a better set of armor for himself.

Thanks to it he was able to blast the approaching enemies with a cone of flames that were quite potent. This battle allowed him to confirm one theory, the enemies didn't really care that much about the base if he was out of it. The moment he went in front of the walls the enemy switched their tactic. Instead of trying to conquer the fort, they decided to kill the lord first.

These puppet soldiers were quite weak. The vast majority of them were on the levels of his own soldiers that were comparable to the level nine or ten monsters in the Albrook dungeon. Their approach also wasn't different as they tried to swarm him from the front and this was the worst possible tactic against a magic user like him.

All of the attackers were blasted by aoe-type spells. Killing ten of the puppets at once was as easy as throwing a flame blast into their group. With the difference in stats, there was no way of them surviving the spreading magical flames. However, they still posed a threat, considering that his armor was only made of steel, the more he used the more the runes continued to deteriorate.

'Fighting out on an open field is different than in a dungeon but... it isn't necessarily more difficult.'

As a couple of arrows were bounced away by the magical shield that was around his body another group of around twenty soldiers attacked him from all sides. Before they could get to him, however, the earth under their feet started becoming soft. The sprint was interrupted by an area of effect that turned everything around him into a pool of mud. With them all being stuck he just needed to harden the ground back and blast away with a torrent of flames to finish them off.

This was one of the bonuses of fighting alone. He did not need to worry about hitting his own men, the archers behind the fort gave him some support as well. Roland just needed to point out with his hand to generate a magical blast, the tight-knit formations were a detriment to fighting him and it was impossible for them to get into close range. Fighting from outside was also not possible as his mana shield could not be pierced by the flimsy arrows shot by low-tier 2 archers.

Nevertheless, after getting rid of around a hundred of the wooden soldiers his armor started becoming undone. The metal that he made it from could not handle the constant use of spells and had burned right through it. Luckily to counter this effect he had one new very helpful skill.

Rapid Machine Reassembly was activated on the armor he was wearing. The holes that had been created by the magical symbols started to get filled back by more steel. For some reason, this skill worked not only on golems but also on runic armor like this. He had no idea how it created more steel

out of nothing but it didn't matter. With the armor mended back into its original state he could take care of the next batch of soldiers without much of a problem which only left their commander.

This time around there was no challenge as their leader just charged along with their troops at Roland. Perhaps if he had noticed the danger beforehand he could have offered a better fight but after suffering so many deaths the enemy troops' morale was too low. It didn't help that their leader wasn't equipped with any magic-countering items. Even a simple mana shield necklace could have given him some options during the last confrontation.

Congratulations on your victory, the enemy forces tremble before your might and have lost the will to fight.

"Huh, what is this? I don't remember this part."

The battle was won and he expected the enemy combatants to run with their tails between their legs. Instead of running, they started dropping their weapons and looking in his direction. It seemed if the enemy troops were overwhelmed they would just toss their weapons and give up. This wasn't all however as they just remained there without moving.

'Are they waiting for something? Could it be possible?'

An idea popped into his head after seeing the demoralized troops of the Lumberlings. This trial was similar to a strategy game and it could also have a diplomacy mechanic behind it. Perhaps it was possible to convert the units of the opposition to his own side. This happened in real life, after the enemy leaders were dealt with, a takeover took place. Some madmen did kill all opposition without taking any prisoners but usually, a lot of people would be spared and then used as a resource.

'Think they are waiting for me to say something, what would a lord say in a time like this?'

Roland was aiming to become an Overlord but he had not really gone through any proper noble training. His manners weren't all that refined as no one had bothered to teach him when he was young. A noble was supposed to lead people, even though that usually wasn't true a proper one was supposed to be a leader. They needed to either inspire respect or engrain enough fear in people to force them to obey.

"Your leader is dead, surrender to me and I promise to spare your lives. If you try to run away, none of you will be spared, this I promise you!"

After picking up the large halberd that the enemy commander dropped he pointed at the enemy troops. When he raised his voice he could actually see the wooden soldiers trembling out of fright. Then after a moment, they started dropping down to their knees in defeat, no one actually dared to make a run for it. There were about thirty of them left on the battlefield, if they spread in all directions even Roland wouldn't be able to get to all of them in time.

You have successfully dominated the demoralized Lumberling Troops but they are not yet ready to join your faction.

'Huh?'

Roland noticed a new message pop up before him. By the looks of it, there was a possibility of turning the opposing soldiers into his own. The hidden requirements weren't met though but this gave him a

few tips toward them. First of all, the key element was the lack of morale and any leader unit present on the battlefield.

'This sounds about right, usually, soldiers would need to go through some kind of re-educating process or even get tortured to renounce their pledge to the old leader... wait, could there be an option for this?'

Previously he bunkered up in a fortress and didn't really take into consideration that there were other choices to gain power. If it was possible to take over other settlements it wasn't strange that he would gain their resources and the wooden people were also part of them. This could save him a lot of gold that he would need to spend on training soldiers but first he needed to go check back in his throne room for any new options that appeared. It wasn't strange for options to be hidden in tests like this and it wouldn't be strange if new ones appeared in the research building.

'First I need to do something with these soldiers, I don't think they'll just wait out here and wait for me.'

The enemy soldiers were down on their knees and not moving. They were probably affected by something like a hidden leader's aura. It would of course vanish the moment he removed himself from the battlefield and they could potentially start fleeing. Luckily there was one place where he could place these thirty soldiers.

"Good, gather up, if you don't resist you will not be killed, this I promise you as the Lord. Soldiers, detain them and take them to our underground dungeon."

He still had the ten leftover archers that didn't leave the fort along with the other troops. Even though it was ten against thirty with Roland around, the enemy combatants would not dare to resist. The place came equipped with a small dungeon that had a few cells, it would be cramped for these thirty wooden puppets but it was a place they could be kept until he found a way of dealing with them.

It went quite smoothly as the Archers descended from the makeshift battlements. With Roland at the helm of the group, they all walked into the wooden fort where all of them were stuffed into the underground dungeon that was under the barracks building. After it was all done he ordered his remaining troops to gather up the spoils of war while he checked the throne room.

'There is an actual re-education camp for this purpose...'

Re-educational Camp

Building

A prison camp for the purpose of indoctrinating enemy soldiers.

'Indoctrinating? They really aren't beating around the bush in this trial huh... but when speaking about indoctrination...'

Roland had unlocked the chapel building and he knew that religion was a big part of indoctrinating people in the real world. If what he assumed was correct then perhaps a new unit besides a battle cleric was possible. To no surprise, an option appeared that required its own research to unlock.

Clergyman

Civilian Unit

Can convert others to your religion and heal units inside temple buildings. Can be placed in the re-educational camp to speed up the indoctrination process.

'It can't be used outside of the city which is a shame but I can use it to convert enemy units, hm perhaps there will be a better unit that will be able to convert units out on the field?'

This was a possibility that couldn't be discounted. Religion was a thing that brought people together and after building his first chapel he established his own. There had to be some common ground when trying to team up with old enemies and religion was one of them. After seeing the new options popping up Roland also realized that this was probably one of the big reasons that the Solarian Church had such power in the whole kingdom.

Even though they could perhaps be a danger to the king's rule, they were necessary to hold the reins on the citizens in the kingdom. Something needed to connect people that were living together. In the beginning, it was easy as tribes stayed relatively small but the more everything grew those close ties began to matter more and more. He wasn't sure if this trial would have anything similar but at least the option to convert others to his side was there. If used right it could save him a lot of military costs.

'It might have been good that I couldn't just convert them instantly onto the battlefield, I don't think my current settlement can even support those thirty soldiers...'

Right next to the gold counter was the population number. While in strategy games it was impossible to go over this number it wasn't the same here. It was slightly more intricate as he would suffer a debuff if the number went into the red. Starvation didn't happen in just one day so this could also be used to his advantage. Even if he went over the threshold he would have some time to work things out before a serious problem arose.

'Hm? Did they capture that settlement?'

While setting up his 'educational' system he noticed that the number representing his current population shot up. It wasn't just that the limit went up, he had also gained more people in general. This could only mean one thing, his attacking force had managed to capture the nearest fort to his own.

To his surprise, there was an update to the system window only after a few seconds the population cap increased. Instead of the white text on a black screen that he was used to he was taken to some kind of graphical interface. There he could see a map of the area that looked like a generic overworld minimap in some games he used to play. He could see his main settlement that was in the middle and in the northern-east region the new one he acquired.

The population limit on his current fort was a hundred people. When counting in the fifty or so soldiers and over forty civilians and workers he had been almost at the limit. This new one had added a further fifty to the cap and it was also possible to build more village buildings and farms there.

'Hm... that settlement is behind mine and they only had around twenty combatants without a captain unit around, I lost three from the forty soldiers that went there.'

After going through the console again he managed to find a recap of the battle. It really was like in a game as he saw a small recap of what had happened. The soldiers that died were the first ones that

scaled the wooden fortification but soon after the whole place was overrun and victory was achieved. No one had surrendered and the faction that was placed there had disappeared from the map entirely.

‘What are the losing conditions to be exact?’

Roland wasn’t sure what he needed to watch out for yet. Considering that he was playing the role of a noble leader he needed to survive. Last time his head was turned into paste by some type of enemy that he couldn’t really remember well. What made up a lord were his subjects and his territory. Probably if he lost all his strongholds then it would be over, without an army and followers there was nothing to lord over. This was a test of being a lord and losing all of his forces and terrain would probably make him a bad one.

‘However... this could mean that I don’t necessarily need to keep this location, as long as I retain at least one settlement it shouldn’t trigger the losing condition.’

At the moment he was in the black as he didn’t recall much past this point. After killing the first commander and building up his defensive structures it became a giant hole in his memory. One of the reasons that he had lost the defensive battle was due to the location of this fort. It had no natural defenses to safeguard him from being attacked. This meant that he needed to equally build up an impenetrable fortress from all sides. If he at least had one side that was safe he would be able to save a lot of gold and perhaps lasting out for longer would have been possible.

‘Could this be a dead-end created by the trial? What if I was never supposed to stay in this fortress, to begin with?’

“Hey Aid, bring me all the information about those Lumberlings, send out the scouts too. I want to know the specs of their fortress.”

“Specs my lord?”

“All the details, the number of their troops but more importantly if there are any natural defenses around them...”

Roland started wondering, probably to be victorious in this test he couldn’t just go to the next extreme that was attacking. Sooner or later while his army was out conquering he would be attacked by an enemy faction. To not lose important strategic locations he would need to at least have enough time to call back the troops. Instead of a full offensive, he needed to settle somewhere in the middle. If this fortress was meant to fall from the start, he just needed to find another one that would allow him to save on some expenses in the long run...