

Runesmith 313

Chapter 313– Tier 3 Trial Part 9.

“How long have I been in here... was I able to get this far during the first attempt?”

Roland wasn't sure of the time frame anymore. Time worked strangely in this place and his mind was becoming weary due to all the sleepless nights he had gone through. Even though there was a lot of the blacksmith NPC could automate he was left inscribing runes on everything. The dream of a rune-powered army went out the door after it became clear that it was impossible to upgrade the smithing building into a runesmithing one.

Due to this setback, he was forced to weigh the pros and cons of using his time. With a hundred men at his disposal, he could pull a few all-nighters to inscribe some basic runes on their weapons. However, when his armies started growing and reaching the thousands he could not continue this feat. Thus, he focused mostly on creating golems and equipment for his commanders. They were the most important units and with the magical equipment, they could turn the tide of battle.

At the moment he wasn't really worried about that but at the length of this test as it had been multiple months since he had arrived. Things weren't going that badly but they weren't going exceptionally well either. He was able to build a large moat around his stone keep, expand the walls and finish all the guard towers. Due to the lack of runesmithing help, he only focused on creating enough generators to power the defensive turrets and then focused on generating some armor for his battle units.

Yet the life of a lord wasn't so easy, there were so many things only he could decide on. If he didn't make a decision the wooden people in this world would start making their own choices. There was a type of randomized factor in all of this as these NPCs had their own life. They needed things like taverns and pubs to keep them lively. Then they also needed guards to keep thieves in check and cloisters with clerics to heal the sick.

All of these things affected his cities in many ways. If there weren't enough guards patrolling the street sooner or later a thieves' den could pop up. Such a city would bring in less gold in general and some functions would be limited. Similar things would happen if they became sick or disgruntled.

Even though there was a lot to manage he was not supposed to do everything exactly himself. Just like in real life, he could give cities to retainers like a lesser lord or a higher-level soldier. If a city was located next to fertile land it was good to send out someone that was versed in cultivating the land. If there was a danger of getting attacked, a unit that was more inclined for combat was the right choice.

Then even if he made all the right choices it didn't always work out but the reverse was also possible, this randomization factor was ever-present. It was as if the trial was telling him that there is nothing like over-preparing and that he should be prepared for the worst-case scenario at any cost. This he kept in the back of his mind but only for the locations with the most strategic value. Roland realized that he was doing the same thing the nobles did in the kingdom by ignoring most of the smaller settlements that didn't generate much income. Even when the residents there were overrun by monsters it didn't affect his bottom line at all.

'Is it trying to tell me to be more ruthless? Would I be able to make these decisions as easily if the people were real?'

Roland asked himself while bringing down his hammer onto a piece of armor. His eyes were slightly bloodshot as he had finished his latest creation. It was a somewhat upgraded version of the armor he used for dungeon grinding. This one came equipped with two retractable shoulder cannons. With an updated code they were able to quickly pick up any enemies on the battlefield even when he was moving. It was tricky for them to not clip his own body during speedy movement and also to not aim at his allies. Luckily each faction in this trial had a unique mana pattern that could be easily calibrated.

Considering that at this point he would be going up against heavily armored enemies he decided to use his old trusted hammer staff design. It looked more like a bulkier version of a pole hammer. It had an elongated tip on the front that could be used for piercing and a slightly bent one on the other side of the hammer. With this, he would be able to pierce through heavy armor while also delivering blunt damage that it was more susceptible to than cutting.

Though cutting weapons like swords and daggers weren't that great against heavy armor, they weren't useless. After tenderizing an armored combatant with a heavy war hammer it was possible to deliver the final blow with a short sword or dagger. Stabbing through a visor in close range wasn't that rare and he could also aim for the joints where usually the protection was thinner.

Still, this weapon was meant to support ranged magical combat at first. With its thickness and implementation of more exotic metals it would last through several battles and the runes would not deteriorate. The same thing could be said about his armor which was an actual improvement from his real-life counterpart.

"I'll get to test this out pretty soon, that faction had fallen already while I was trying to expand my own influence. They will probably start conquering all the other nations before coming here..."

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The Woodlanders had become rowdy in the north and conquered the western nation. The two middle ones were in a power struggle but now with the north getting involved, they would probably start buckling under pressure. He had not remained passive through all of this as he had already learned his lesson with the previous trial.

While the Woodlanders were attacking their western neighbors Roland's lands were invaded by the southeastern faction. To his surprise, it was the same Kindlings that he had to compete against in his first trial attempt. They had gained new lands and were a lot better equipped than last time. Their first push was for one of the smaller settlements that they were able to easily capture.

Before they arrived he was sure to pull back most of his soldiers that then bunkered up at the fort that he first started in. It had been equipped with some runic turrets when he was there and had enough firepower to last through the first siege attempt. Soon after he was able to arrive with his own army to push them back. Just like after all battles he was sure to capture all the enemy soldiers and start his conversion tactics.

If the defeat of the Lumberling faction was the first step, then attacking his own neighbors was a big leap. This was the beginning of the first struggle and already months had passed since a few back-and-forth encounters with the Kindlings. None of them he took part in but instead it was up to his

commanders and captain. Some fights were lost but most of them were won. Now there was one last thing to do and it was finally worthy of his time.

'I guess the Overlord should never appear until the last moment, is that how it's supposed to work?'

Finishing his new runic armor was just the first step, now he needed to test it out on the battlefield. While the largest faction was already looking at attacking their southern neighbors he still needed to add the finishing touches. His own target had barricaded themselves out in the mountains in a similar stronghold to his own. Now there was a moat and actual towers with defenders.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Good, I'll leave the place to you, manage it well, and follow the instructions that I laid out."

A different aid bowed before him, this one was over level one hundred and had actually advanced into a prestige class called 'The Lord's Hand'. This wooden man was like a high-class noble and secondary commander. If this castle he established was attacked he would be able to give the defenders an almost identical morale boost as him.

The armor that he had made was already worn by him and felt quite natural. The runic symbols started gleaming and the two turrets that were on his shoulders retracted back for the time they would be needed. On the outside a wooden horse covered in armor was already waiting for him. After getting on he looked to the large group of mounted knights that he was the leader of. After being here for close to half a year it didn't feel so off to command them but he wasn't sure if this place wasn't affecting his mental state.

'I need to go back as soon as I can but I also can't rush it...'

Thanks to his various skills that allowed him to clear his head he knew that if he pushed it too much that he would fail. Luckily not everything had to be done in real-time in this place. This army of his that was moving out would normally need several weeks to get to their destination. With the help of the trial's fast travel system, it would skip through it all the way until he arrived. Usually, he didn't use this method as the skipped time could have always been used to craft new items.

A prompt appeared before him, it was asking him if he wished to fast travel to the enemy stronghold. Slowly he moved his fingertips to confirm his choice and instantly his vision started blurring. He could see his army moving through the lands at an increased rate. A window representing the progress of the army was on the upper right side.

It was possible for him to stop their advance manually and also for an unexpected event to occur. Previously when he was going through the world with a smaller troop he had encountered some monsters. It was also possible to skip through things like that and let his wooden men take care of it for him.

However, it was always better to get involved in these things if he could as skipped time could never be taken back. It was a quality of life improvement but it was an obvious trap for lazy people. No one that skipped through all the hard work could ever hope to become an Overlord and using this function for fast traveling was the only good thing about it.

‘So we are here... Looks a bit gloomy.’

The scenery stopped moving rapidly past him and a large black castle on top of a small mountain appeared. The sun had just gone down so the whole thing was illuminated by torches. Compared to the first stone keep he attacked, this one would be a tougher nut to crack. First of all, there would not be a possibility of him pushing down the walls with a battering ram. A large moat was blocking the way and the bridge to the main gate was a type that could be raised.

‘There aren’t any infiltration units in this trial, the best move would be to have an assassin get in and lower the bridge during the siege.’

He wasn’t sure why his scouts couldn’t evolve into those sorts of units but it seemed that this place didn’t want him to use underhanded methods. Instead, only strategic approaches or pure might was allowed. In his case, he was trying to mix both together. His class was poised for intelligence but thanks to his crafting skills he was able to make up for his deficiencies during combat.

Usually, without battle skills and passives upgrading all those, it was impossible for a crafter to last out. At first, the higher multiplier might have seemed like a game changer but it had its limits. In a battle of strength, he could potentially win against someone that possessed a warrior class but if that class had any skills to enhance their power then it would be impossible.

This chasm of skills that had hidden multipliers that could go against the tiers could only be scaled thanks to his runes. With his armor on he could mimic buffing spells and also produce magical attacks that were on if not over the level of proper skills. Then if coupled with exterior factors like runic batteries and golems, he could potentially become a one-man army.

These golems were already getting ready for some action. Even though it was a grueling grind to achieve he was able to enlarge the chassis of his spider drones. Instead of being the size of a middle-sized dog, these were closer to a horse. They weren’t as mobile as their smaller counterparts but their cannons were much bigger. Their job was not to dodge but to damage and soon they would be used to conquer this keep. Normally, what he would have to do would be to create multiple catapults or trebuchets to get those walls down. That is if this was just a regular world with normal rules. With magic being part of it, there was no reason to produce huge siege weaponry when he could just use something different. In this case, the enlarged spider golems would use their cannons and the reservoir of runic batteries to do the trick.

Roland was doing most things by the book, in this case, there was no reason not to. First, he made sure to stay out of range of the archers and ballistas. The spider golems were automatons with a program to make their own measurements. They didn’t require test fires and could quickly place themselves in the best spot for continuous fire. In a way, they were like mini tanks that could fire various magical projectiles.

For the time being, he just needed to wait in the back while his army got ready. The enemy commander certainly didn’t expect the large golems to be part of the siege. They had barricaded themselves inside due to losing multiple skirmishes with Roland’s wooden forces. On the surface the two wooden kingdoms were about equal in most regards, the only variable was their leader. Thanks to the various golems and magical weaponry that was powered with runic batteries most battles could be quickly shifted in his favor.

This didn't mean that such things would last forever. The enemies he was facing had around a thousand soldiers and he was the same. If the war continued and the number of troops kept increasing, keeping up with the runic weapons would become quite strenuous. At the moment a few spider-cannoneers were enough to get through a castle's walls but this would not be enough when going against ten times the troops.

'They really have nothing to defend against these, good that I kept them hidden away...'

Keeping an ace up a sleeve was something a good leader needed to have. This trial was changing with each day and sometimes he would find the enemy commanders performing smart tricks. In the future, it wouldn't be strange if a way to counter his spider troops was discovered.

From the information that his scouts started gathering the Woodlanders were in possession of some magical troops. If these Kindlings had something like a magical shield to enhance their walls, the magical cannon fire would have been severely diminished. It would be even possible for them to launch a counterattack. As it stood now it was becoming a slaughter, his faction had just advanced too quickly.

'They are certainly stuck in the old era of weaponry, they should have invested more into magic than only physical troops...'

It was obvious that his enemies had a lot of troops and the walls were quite sturdy. Their setup was robust but it was also outdated. After the bulky spiders had dug into the ground they commenced with the bombardment. It was quite a one-sided show as the enemy archers were sent flying all over the place by various magical explosions.

Crimson flames filled the guard towers that were meant to fire large ballista bolts and arrows from afar. The walls were starting to buckle under the pressure after they were bombarded by heavy rocks made from earth magic. There was no reason to move, no reason to push until all of the defenses had been destroyed. Only after his golems blew a large enough hole in the wall would he decide to risk his troops.

'It's working but these golems use up a lot of mana, if the walls were much thicker or had a second layer on the inside...'

While the siege had only begun Roland was already thinking about the next big move. The damage to the castle and the troops inside would be best kept to a minimum as he needed those soldiers for the coming battles. After field testing the golems he could finally decide to produce more units for future confrontations with his real opponent in the north. This was only a little side quest to get more leverage for the future encounters that would decide on the test results that he could not afford to fail.

Chapter 314– Tier 3 Trial Part 10.

"Please show mercy, I surrender!"

'Well, this was unexpected, it's deviating from the last scenario...'

Roland looked at the Lord Commander of this castle that was standing kneeling down. It would be as easy as taking candy from a child to deliver the killing blow to this enemy but he was asking to spare his life. The duel between the faction leaders had started just like last time but the opponent capitulated without them even going through one exchange of blows.

‘Could this be due to the power differential or something else?’

The siege of the stone castle was now over. His heavy spiders were able to blast a hole in the wall while also keeping the archers and enemy ballistas at bay. Soon after his army was able to rush inside with him right behind it. Inside they witnessed a moderate amount of resistance but not as much as he expected. Now instead of having a duel with the master of this castle, he was being surrendered to.

Do you accept the surrender of the Kindling faction?

He was given an option without much of an explanation. There was no way of knowing what would happen after he agreed. There were two possible events that could unfold if he agreed here. Either this whole place would just become his and join his side along with the NPCs or they would become his vassals.

Roland was more inclined to believe the latter to happen. Even when soldiers surrendered and were without a leader they needed to go through indoctrination camps. If he killed this Lord Commander of theirs while he was kneeling there was also a possibility of infamy. After staying here for a while he was convinced that there was some type of hidden renown system in the background. Considering that he never had anyone from the lords surrender to him, perhaps he would be considered a warmonger if he just beheaded him in this situation.

But then if he left him alive would this wooden lord truly listen to his orders? It was like taking another kingdom while leaving their old king some autonomy to direct it. Scenarios did play out like this but it was always a risk to leave an old monarch in power. Usually, the old king and his line would be asked to step down. Then they would be replaced by another noble that had closer ties to whoever conquered the lands. This could be a noble from the faction that was conquered that had aided in the conquest or a noble from the invader’s side.

‘Should I take him up on the offer and replace him with one of the Lord’s Aids? But the support for a member of my court would probably be lower than the original monarch...’

There were a lot of pros and cons to each decision. Considering this test didn’t like when he focused on one side too much, being too lenient wouldn’t be a great idea. There was no reason for him to trust in the words of their leader. It wouldn’t be strange that when the time came he would be the first one to sink a dagger into his back.

‘They capitulated due to the power difference, the moment I’m out of these lands they might quickly revert to their old ways or even worse. When the time to fight the Woodlanders comes and I start losing, they might just desert instantly...’

“So, you wish to surrender?”

“Yes, I do!”

“I will allow it but you shall no longer be the lord of these lands. You will need to relinquish your title to a person of my choosing and will be banished from these lands but you may leave, do you accept these terms?”

“You want me to go into banishment?”

“Yes. Accept these terms and you may leave, I will also promise not to harm your citizens or your soldiers.”

Roland made sure to talk loudly so the residents of the castle heard their conversation. Their Lord was already acting in a cowardly fashion but he could save some honor if it was known that he was doing it for the citizens and not to just save his own skin. In a sense, he was giving him a way out but also keeping him away from any positions of power. It was a curious game-like event with a lot of results depending on what he did. Considering that his aim was the conservation of resources then it wasn't such a bad decision.

“I... I accept...”

“T-the lord has fallen...”

While the conversation was happening he made sure to aim the runic shoulder cannons at his enemy for intimidation purposes. For a moment it sounded like he would fight back but when his magical force was ramped up, the wooden man lost all semblance of resisting. To his surprise, the surrender was not the only boon from this confrontation as he had gained a new skill too.

You have gained a new skill: Runic Suppression

Runic Suppression

Skill

Allows the user to infuse their runic creations with a menacing aura that can intimidate lesser opponents.

‘Huh, what’s this skill? Menacing aura? Is this producing some type of killing intent or something?’

The description wasn't clear but it seemed that when he tried to intimidate the Lord Commander here, he was simulating some type of killing intent. This allowed him to create a skill to suppress weaker opponents. Similar skills like this existed in the world and were produced by some monsters. Sometimes when encountering a dragon people would freeze up and be unable to move. This was due to skills like this that were meant to disable weaker enemies.

‘This could be useful in a large-scale fight but I didn't know that I could learn new skills in this place. Could this be a Runesmith Overlord-related skill?’

This was quite strange as usually in trials he would be given all the skills at the end and not in the middle. Perhaps it was possible when all the conditions were met to acquire the skill in question.

‘The only downside is that I need runes to use it or it won't work...’

It felt like the skill was a lesser variant of the suppression skill. Without having some type of runic equipment it would probably not activate. However, he was a runesmith so this wouldn't be that much of a problem. While standing there he activated the new skill that spread to the sides, some of the close aids to the now-fallen lord started trembling which was quite an interesting display.

The skill made all of the runes on his armor glow in a dark red light and some type of aura escaped from his form. It was hard to describe but the effect was real; it didn't seem to be affecting the actual soldiers

as much. Perhaps the discrepancy in levels had to be a lot higher to make it work. Nevertheless, it could come in handy whenever he needed to intimidate someone for some information. In this case, he was able to get the Lord Commander to abdicate from his position.

“Take him away. People of the Kindlings, if you don’t resist no one from you will be harmed, put down your weapons and this will end now.”

His shout backed by the intimidation skill was a lot louder than he expected. The weaker soldiers trembled a bit but they still looked to some of the captains and lesser commanders that were standing there. While their Lord had decided to abandon them, there were still some units that could take his place. Luckily this didn’t happen and they started throwing away their weapons.

Congratulations on capturing a stronghold and accepting the Kindling faction as a vassal.

The victory

Announcement

was a bit different than the one during his victory over the Lumberlings. With this victory, he had gained a vassal nation and after sitting down in their throne room he was given a new window. There he could decide who to place in the managing position. It seemed that the requirements were limited to commander units that belonged to his faction or aids. The system didn’t state it but there were probably pros and cons to each choice he made here.

This was his first real victory in months while defeating the Lumberlings took him a bit over a month; this one took close to half a year. Previously he expected the trial to come to a close when this time arrived but as it stood, four large factions still remained. Luckily he had not stayed here truly for half a year. There were times that he skipped through some events.

With this new land, he pushed himself to the forefront. The other two in the middle were dead set on killing each other. They had been at it from the start and were very equally matched. Probably only if Roland or the Woodlanders got involved would one side be victorious.

‘If I consider that it is possible for them to surrender, then there could be a diplomatic way of resolving this dispute. What if I ally myself with one of these two factions and help them beat the other?’

There were various ways of allying the two kingdoms, war was not always the right choice. Information was needed on the two factions that were in the middle. Though he could not produce assassins there was a way to evolve them into spies that could gather information. They had already been sent out on a mission before he left his main city, with the time dilation from fast traveling they should have gathered all the required information.

When he clicked on the console in this palace he was able to see that after waiting a day, the news would be able to reach him along with some units ready to take this place over. For a few days, he took over this palace and was sure to assign all the available workers to city repairs. Around thirty percent of the soldiers had died in the siege and while he was here they could start their conversion process. As long as he remained here all such facilities would be given a buff.

To his surprise when the information came it showed him a way to get through this scenario while conserving a lot of time. One of the factions was named the Foresters and the other Plankers. The names seemed to get even more ridiculous with time but this wasn't the astonishing part.

The Foresters were a more passive faction that allowed the smaller settlements to capitulate of their own volition. Their army was mostly focused on their borders and they were focused on keeping people out. Their competitors were quite aggressive though and their leader was described as a warmonger. The fact that he was given the rumored character of their leaders already was a tip on how to handle them.

His new potential allies were apparently led by someone that was considered weak but somehow managed to keep it together. There were rumors that their lord was wise and good at making trade deals with all the smaller factions that with time were all absorbed by his larger one. If he was good at making deals then perhaps it would be beneficial to Roland to send in an envoy. If the unit came back intact then there was a possibility of trading.

'I don't need them to join my faction, it will be fine if they just stay inside of their own little part of this zone. The two other factions will surely try to attack them so they will need all the help they can get and if I conquer those two, the tree people will have to become my vassal and I'll pass this damn trial...'

There was no need for him to go to war with everyone in these lands. If these people weren't as bloodthirsty as the others, perhaps they were intended as a potential ally. Sometimes trials like this gave people a certain path to follow that wasn't always too obvious. It was possible that not going through varied approaches would put him on a path of destruction.

'I don't see a reason not to at least try but first I need to decide on some gifts. Normally when you do things like this you are supposed to give them some presents or other reasons to accept the offer...'

There were various ways of going through diplomatic means, intimidation was also one of the possible ways of going about it. Perhaps if time wasn't so precious here it would have been able to scare the Kindlings into raising the white flag after surrounding their city. Cutting off their supply of food would make the citizens quite mad and also weaken the soldiers that required sustenance as well.

Roland was thinking about a softer approach though. These Foresters were already surrounded by two bloodthirsty nations, if he acted the same they would not trust him. Thus his plan was formed and time began to pass. His sleeping schedule started becoming slightly better after gaining his second major victory. Things started to become a bit drawn out and the trial even began pushing him to end it.

There were occasions when he was forced to turn in for the night even if he didn't want to. Time skips began to be more frequent and he was unable to work on as much runic equipment as he wished. Soon the days skipped along as managing his little kingdom became more automatic. He wasn't sure if this was a limitation of the test or it trying to tell him that Kings had to learn to push work onto others.

Nevertheless, he was able to push through with a diplomatic solution with the Forester faction. They had grown weary enough of the Woodlanders and their other neighbor to seek a truce with his faction that had proven itself to be somewhat merciful. This cost him a lot of gold and resources in bribes but considering that he didn't have to lose any soldiers, the cost was worth it.

Then to seal the deal he was even able to marry off one of his own commanders that had become the lord of the previously captured Kindling castle. This method was very popular among the nobility of any kingdom or empire. The bonds were supposed to tie families together and be a knot not easily untied. Here it gave him some hidden bonuses to trust and his new allies even promised to lend them their armies if the time came.

The months continued to tick as he tried to scrunch some time for further inventions. The Woodlanders had managed to invade the Plankers that were unable to conquer their neighbors that were being supported by Roland's own armies and finances. It was a proxy war from which he profited and it allowed him to build up his armies while getting ready for the final trial.

This came a lot sooner than he expected as the Woodlanders started pushing hard. After they had the lands of the Plankers they had access to Roland's borders. A fight ensued along those lines and continued for several weeks until even he had to get involved. Even though he was able to protect his borders his allies weren't as lucky. Their defensive line had to contend with their main forces while he defeated some leftovers from the previous conquest.

Troops were sent from his other strongholds and the real war started. Many small and large skirmishes were fought with no clear winner being produced. Thankfully thanks to his diplomatic approach he was able to keep the fighting out of his side of the conflict. A proxy war where he sent to aid in the form of weapons and food was started while he just slowly built up a larger force. When the time was right he finally plunged himself into the lands that were previously captured by the Woodlanders.

His golems played a big role in sieging the cities but soon enough he started encountering magical countermeasures. These could be countered whenever he was at the location but some casualties to his runic equipment had become more common. The test was finally ramping up and no more were the battles easily won by the application of his magic. Strategy and the use of the terrain had become more apparent and even luring in enemies by sacrificing troops had become a reality.

Everything moved and he had to adapt yet still he prevailed for multiple months. With time the conflict started escalating with even the Woodlanders fabled Lord Commander having to get involved. The time for the confrontation was fast approaching and he needed to prepare his troops and get his allies on the same page. One last final meeting would decide on the future of this battle and prove if he chose the right path or would have to take this trial once more.