

Runesmith 305

Chapter 305: Tier 3 Trial Part 2

“So, is this supposed to be the lord’s throne room or something?”

Roland spoke to himself while entering the shoddy-looking fort. It was on a motte which was a mound formed to house it. The elevation wasn’t that high up and the wooden walls consisted of the same sharpened logs tied together by rope. These fortifications wouldn’t really stop anyone, perhaps people below level twenty-five would have to scamper around him but besides that, it would go down quickly.

It was not much of a fort as there weren’t any watchtowers outside and only one building directly in the middle. The size of this building was comparable to a small house but there was a lot of space around it. This wide open space gave him the impression that it was supposed to be filled out by something and the answers he found on the inside.

The inside of this almost hut was primarily empty. A long brown carpet made out of some sort of animal hide led up to a large chair which was probably supposed to be his throne room. The position of the throne was slightly elevated and on the sides there were several windows that let some sunlight in. Besides the large chair, there were also some torches that could probably be lit when the space needed to be used during the night.

When entering this place he had the Lord’s Aid puppet trailing behind him but the moment he entered this area the automaton stopped in place. It didn’t seem that it wasn’t able to enter the area by itself but waited to be allowed inside instead. It seemed that the wooden people really saw him as their leader and would follow some rules concerning this role play here.

Roland decided to go around this place and after reaching the throne his gaze landed on it. The thing was made all out of wood and lacked any type of soft cushioning for his behind. Perhaps he would need to use it for something later but for now, he discovered a door to the side. When going through it he was taken to what looked to be the Lord’s bed chamber. A large bed with a mattress filled with something was there for his use. To the side, he also spotted a chair at a desk with some parchments and notebooks.

“Nothing to actually read, just empty pages to write things in... how long do they expect me to be in this trial?”

There was a quill along with some ink that he was very familiar with. It was just like the first one that he used when he went through his runic mana scribe faze. When looking at this place he had a premonition that it could take a few months before he gets out. The pages here were probably to take notes and maybe to plan things out for the future. His first task was to defend this place which he needed to prepare for.

“The fifty soldiers I have wouldn’t pose much of a threat to the current me, the enemies are supposed to arrive in around a week’s time, what should I do in the meantime? Is there anything in here that I can use?”

Roland had hoped to at least find a map of the area somewhere in here but it wasn’t there. Perhaps he would need to draw it up himself while exploring the areas around the castle. As it stood he had some

time to allocate to everything. The soldiers had their orders to train up as he had gone to the barracks but he had yet to decide on the resource allocation.

'I just wanted to be a shop owner...'

This whole trial was making him want to cancel and go pick up the Master Runesmith pathway. While he was fine fighting monsters and crafting gear, leading troops wasn't something he was familiar with. When going down into dungeons he was also a solo adventurer with only Agni being his only companion. When joining other groups he was never really part of them and never cared about working as a team player. Now he needed to somehow lead these puppets to victory.

'Well, these automatons might be more like golems than people so it will make things a lot easier, they also don't seem to question me in any way.'

While contemplating his next step and gathering more information he finally decided to sit down on the throne made for him. It would be quite tiresome to go around this place on foot as it wasn't that small. Luckily to his surprise when he sat down another system panel popped out before him.

'Wait... this looks similar to one of those games...'

Roland came from the modern world and had gone through all sorts of types of games. Role-playing games and strategy games were some of the ones that he enjoyed. The interface before him was quite low on the graphical spectrum but it was similar to some of the strategy games that he played.

In the upper right corner, he could see the same gold icon that he witnessed when interacting with the merchant. To the right side of the icon was the number corresponding to his current gold level. When he tried tapping on the gold to get more information he saw the letter one with a plus sign next to it.

'Huh... could this be how much gold I gain per day... or per hour?'

Everything started making more sense as this whole trial was shaping up to be some sort of game. The plus one gold was probably how much of it he would gain per cycle but he would only know after some time passed. At the moment he had exactly a hundred gold but it wasn't the only resource that was there. After going through various other screens filled with pixel art he found that there was a lot more to this thing than met the eye.

'It is a Runesmith-related trial so it's normal for it to have all those various materials.'

The screen gave him a very intricate list of materials which were also separated by quality. There were metals like iron, bronze, and myhril. Some of them came in ingot form while others in raw ore form. They had quantity numbers assigned to them but as it stood now he only had simple metals at his disposal.

'There is an actual map... but most of it is covered by dark fog... this is really just like a strategy game map. Does this mean I have to send a scout out to look for other resources?'

It didn't take him that long to grasp the situation here and the controls were easy to understand. The trials were said to be created to suit the people taking them and also adapt to their life experiences. In his previous life, Roland spent countless hours playing games that shaped this test that could create a

whole world within itself. Probably if a denizen of this world took the same trial the parameters would change to suit their understanding of things around them.

He wasn't quite sure if this was a blessing or a curse just yet. Thanks to this system within a system it was possible for him to automate a lot of things and quickly order his troops around. However, if the trial wanted to remain fair it would need to turn up the difficulty of it all. It wouldn't be strange if the added information would cause the opponents to become stronger, either by the size of their troops increasing or their tactics becoming more intricate.

"Okay... first I need to send someone out to scout for more resources, this small encampment is generating one gold but everything costs at least one gold..."

This throne room allowed some conveniences as he didn't need to directly go to the barracks to assign the training regiment to the soldiers. The one Wooden Warrior that he didn't give a new class was also there, now that he was here he began thinking about the future. All of the lower-level soldiers had numbers attached to them that corresponded to their levels but also how much they leveled up from training.

Roland needed to wait for a day until he calculated all the numbers but perhaps before the enemies arrived in a week's time he could advance every one of his wooden men to another class. When thinking of this and the mapping problem he realized that he could assign a Wooden Scout class. Each of the classes had a small description to go along with it which made the choice a lot easier.

Wooden Scout

This unit has gained skills in discovery, it can see farther than other classes and discover hidden treasures or enemies.

'It's even showing me some of its stats and also the weapons it can use.'

Strength

E +

Agility

D -

Dexterity

D -

Vitality

E

Endurance

E +

Intelligence

F

Willpower

F

The scout was a light unit and couldn't wear heavy armor. It was good at handling short swords, daggers, and bows. It also got a skill in horse riding which would allow it to scout out the areas around his fort a lot faster. It was not much of a question, he needed at least one scouting unit to see what was around him. After clicking the option he was given a loading screen that slowly started to fill up.

'At this rate, it seems that it will take a day to upgrade a unit to the second tier 1 class, it wouldn't be strange if it took longer when going to tier 2.'

"Aid, come here."

"Yes, My Lord! How could I be of service!"

"Tell me about our enemies, where is their headquarters located and where will they be coming from, do you have any information about their numbers, don't leave anything out!"

"Yes, My Lord. The Kindlings will arrive here in a week! They hail from the northern stronghold..."

"Wait, they are called the Kindlings?"

"Yes, My Lord, truly a despicable name, isn't it?"

"Despicable... uh, how are our people called?"

"Why, we are the great Timberlings!"

'What is it with these names, why is it all about wood?'

Roland started wondering if he had some kind of fascination with wood in the past that could have brought this type of setting. Maybe after seeing Bernir perform some nice carpentry he wanted to become one himself but was already locked into the Runesmith class?

"Ah yes, continue..."

The wooden aid started speaking and giving him some basic information about the whole situation. While there he also was able to look through available structures that he could build, one of them was a stable that would allow him to give his scout a mount. It didn't cost that much and more information about the location was something that he needed to gain as fast as possible.

If this worked like a strategy game then there were probably all sorts of resources scattered across the region he was in. Usually, in those games, a person would begin close to some kind of resource-generating mine but he didn't have anything like that here. If there were some iron ore mines close he could start producing steel and have better weapons to meet his enemies.

However, if this was doable in a week was questionable but it would only take a day for the stables to be built. The same was the case for some other buildings like the mill and lumber camp, they all only took one day to assemble. This was one of the decisions he needed to make. Was it better to quickly expand the range of his base camp or bunker himself up and wait for his enemies to come?

Time was also a resource and this was a sort of game. Even wasting one day could be disastrous; it could snowball into him not being able to gain enough resources in time for another problem that arose. Roland was also not sure if this was only a defensive trial, there were far too many red flags pointing to another option.

‘An Overlord seems like someone that wouldn’t shy away from battle or conquering others.’

This throne allowed him to monitor his entire base of operations. With it, he could probably also manage other territories that he conquered. It wouldn’t be strange that he had some wiggle room in this scenario. There was always more than one way of getting through these. He might be able to create a massive bastion that couldn’t be captured by anything here or spread out his armies to conquer the other denizens of this world before they become an obstacle.

‘I need to know what my footing is before attempting to blitz everyone around me. I don’t even know who my enemies are, maybe diplomacy is also an option?’

Roland gave out a sigh while thinking about this troublesome test he was in. There were just too many factors for him to account for. This was probably why this class was a prestigious one, he would really need to work for it this time. When thinking back to his old Runemith Lord class, the test then felt quite trivial. Here he would probably have to strain both his brain and muscles.

After being filled in on the situation around him he began drawing up a plan. The notebooks came in handy as he wrote in the most important parts like the enemy ‘kingdoms’. In this case, it seemed that they weren’t much bigger than the little city fort that he found himself in but even having an idea where they were coming from made things easier.

While his scout unit and stables that cost twenty-five gold units were being assembled he decided to visit the city blacksmith. It was clear to him that his troops needed better weapons and better armor. There was no use for the city lord to run around outside to endanger his life while scouting for things, instead he would spend his time here while using the limited troops he was given.

For a skilled craftsman like him, it was child's play to assemble an iron sword of the highest rank. It was the same thing for the iron spears and iron arrows which he decided to augment with some runes. While a weapon made from iron was abysmal for holding runic charges and would actually melt the weapon after a few uses, they were fine on arrows. When the tip connected with something it would just explode and didn’t need to do much more than that.

It was quite a busy day for him, besides all the crafting he began exploring the surroundings. There were a lot of empty spots to place buildings in and he took some time to draw up a plan of the whole wooden fortress that looked more like a village surrounded by wooden logs. Roland needed to decide on the structure placement as his current funds allowed him to start generating some resources.

First of all, it looked like he needed to build a mill and a farm to produce crops. With farms up there he would be given some villagers that would actually generate more gold and the surplus of the produce they generated could be sold for profit or maybe even traded for something else.

After going through all the various panels Roland figured out the gameplay loop this place had. First of all, he needed to generate resources that could be used for various things which culminated in

upgrading the Town Center and his fort. The first upgrade required a set number of lumber and stones that he could gain by creating buildings like a quarry and lumber mill.

There was a large forest right next to his fort which would make it easy to generate lumber and a good location was soon discovered by his scout not far from the forest. The nearby mountain area had a lot of stone and also iron ore that could be mined. Creating a mining camp would take care of both of those resources but there was another loop to create workers.

First, he needed to create some residential buildings for people to live in. Then he needed to assign jobs to them and also have enough food to keep them fed through their working days. Luckily the croplands that were created by the farms produced wheat and then bread with the help of the mills rather quickly. All the components were there but the trial world took some liberties with how things worked to hasten some of the activities that didn't seem to matter as much.

Soon he had something that looked like an actual proper town as the week winded down. However, this was only the beginning as the people from the opposing faction finally appeared the way they looked was a bit surprising but after getting used to his own citizens that were made of wood, the sight of wooden men with burning heads didn't move him anymore.

"My Lord, the enemies are here, we must defend the fort!"

A horn sounded to signal the appearance of an enemy faction that was dead set on taking over their lands and taking all of their resources.

Chapter 306: Tier 3 Trial Part 3.

'They look really similar to the puppet soldiers on my side, It's like a pallet swap in a game... or a rare skin.'

Roland was looking at the Kindling forces that arrived from the north side where his fort was. Their appearance was close to the Timberling soldiers that were on his side but with a few changes. The wood they were made of was a bit darker and they had some flames coming out of their wooden heads. He was not sure if they were purely cosmetic or a source of some sort of magical attack but this would become apparent in the coming battle.

"My Lord, the enemy numbers in the hundreds, what are your orders?"

"Just stick to the plan for now, as expected they have more soldiers than us but it shouldn't be a problem if they stick to the route..."

His Aid was standing right next to him and only was capable to give him an arbitrary number of the enemy forces. On the side of the Timberlings there were fifty soldiers, all of them able to gain their second tier 1 class enhancement. Considering he took their talents into consideration he ended up with twenty spearmen, twenty swordsmen, and ten archers. Then within them, they had a subset of spearmen using shields with shorter spears while others used longer ones.

From a glance, it seemed that the Kindling forces had about four times as many people as they did. If they met each other on an open field then the result would be an obvious loss of all his soldiers. However, this was a defensive battle and even though the walls of this settlement weren't that high, they would still need to be destroyed before they were able to directly attack his forces.

“The enemy is approaching, arches raise your bows!”

The wooden soldier captain that had leveled up to level sixty this week started giving out commands. The archers that were equipped with exploding arrows would be the center point of this defensive strategy. If they did their job well then he expected the small enemy army to be eradicated before they reached the gateway inside.

North was where his motte and bailey fort was facing and where the entrance gateway was built. It was slightly more robust than the walls on the sides and a bridge made of logs could be extended over the moat. At this moment it had been pulled back inside the castle so that the enemy forces would have to contend with the shallow waters and mud.

Roland would have loved to have some time to expand his defenses but he didn't have enough funds for it. After creating the bare-bones facilities for his villagers he didn't have much to spend on the defenses. He was able to scrimp enough to build a wooden rampart for the ten archers to stand on, from there they could use their ranged attacks against the opposition.

Next to the ten archers stood ten shield swordsmen that would protect them from any enemy fire that was coming. Down on the ground, the spearmen waited, there were some small holes in the log walls that could be used by them. If the enemies arrived and tried scaling them they would get poked to death.

Roland wasn't sure if it would come to this part though, this was not a normal wave of mindless monsters but something that was simulating human behavior. If everything went as he planned it out then a huge blow would be dealt to the invaders. Normally after suffering big losses a commander should decide to pull out, perhaps their forces would lose enough morale to even flee by themselves.

It was an interesting factor in this trial that also affected his own forces. Back in the throne room where he could command everything there was a morale counting for the army. The wooden captain would raise this stat of the troops that was giving them a buff to their numbers. The same was with him, he was considered a special unit, like a hero, and whenever he was close to his troops they would be stronger. Just standing here on the rampart with the archers would boost their stats by a few levels.

“My Lord, please take shelter in the fort and leave this to the soldiers, what if something happens to you?”

“Nothing will happen to me, now order the archers to begin.”

“Yes Lord...”

Roland also noticed that his role as the 'Lord' was somewhat special. While he was increasing the stats of his soldiers when standing here the buff might be lost and turn into a debuff if he wasn't careful. When he actually engaged in battle and got injured himself it would probably affect the soldiers in a negative way just like in the real world. Most of the time nobles hung out behind strong defense lines where they continued to give orders. If they were killed or captured the fighting was usually over.

If he looked at it as a strategy game, then he was a special unit with unique abilities and worth. He could probably give out a moral boost that was of a higher degree than any of his commander units but if he was defeated in battle or even injured it could adversely affect his troops. This was the same for the

opposition, if their leader was defeated then if they didn't have anyone to take over, the battle would be over.

Finally, the charge was started and signaled by a toot of a war horn. The enemy wooden soldiers started charging with spears raised. Their composition was very simple and consisted mostly of spearmen and archers. The only mounted unit was their leader that was giving out orders on top of a wooden horse which made the whole scene quite bizarre to the only human here.

'Not much of a formation there, they are just diving towards the main gate where the archers are stationed. Is this because this is just the beginning of the trial or because they are low leveled and it limits their strategy?'

The enemy had the number advantage which gave them the edge. The wooden walls made from logs wouldn't last for long and from afar he also spotted some wooden ladders being carried behind the troops that were charging. They intended to just scale the short walls and jump over before continuing with the assault. The archers that were visible were probably their main target of this rush as they could have attempted to get in from the sides instead.

'Well, maybe he doesn't want to thin out his troops, there aren't that many of them and this is a small-scale battle...'

Roland had prepared some tactical mines which were placed on the south, west, and east sides of his city. They were spread out to signal them if anyone attempted to sneak in an attack. During this maddened rush it would have been an opportunity to sneak in from the back or from the sides but nothing went off. Neither did the scout unit that was hiding outside activate the specially made runic device.

It was time to move into phase first of the plan that was hastily prepared by him and his one and only aid. The archers took aim and started attacking the troops on the outer edges. The arrows didn't even need to collide with their bodies as connecting with the ground was enough to produce a magical explosion.

Roland wanted to cry a bit on the inside after seeing the first arrow go up in smoke. There was not even a full week for him to prepare the ammunition as the blacksmith NPC couldn't copy his runic designs. He was forced to inscribe each arrow tip by himself and without the possibility of drinking any mana potions.

With the lack of any magical parchment at his disposal, he needed to use the little iron that was given to him. Even though the iron ore mine had been discovered and was already operational it didn't have enough output to keep up with the demand. He needed to burn through all the resources he was given and now the enemy troops were being guided toward some of his creations.

While the arrows packed a lot of power and were able to kill a wooden soldier in one hit, they weren't hitting the target constantly. They had a large assortment of ammunition that their glorious lord had stayed up almost the entire week making. Even though some of them missed, they did their job of funneling them toward a certain location.

'It's working, they are getting onto it...'

Roland had a lot of experience with explosives and earth magic. It wasn't a new tactic to lure opponents into a more favorable location while acting meek. The archers on top of the walls didn't look that strong and the flimsy walls that could be easily broken down or scaled were just a distraction. The true force was packed underground in small pockets that wouldn't be discovered even by an experienced mage.

The moment the wooden soldiers crossed a point the trap started activating. It was set up on a delay so that there was enough time for each and every mine to go off while someone was in the vicinity. Only the set planted directly in front of their moat would explode instantly and finally, the fireworks started.

BOOM

A group of wooden people was thrown into the air by an explosive rune. It was inscribed onto a thin plate made from pig iron and had enough power to produce a tier 2 explosive spell. Soon like dominos each and every magical explosive that was in the vicinity was going off. The troop's charge was halted and they were all going up in flames without Roland needing to engage them in battle.

'Hm... will they retreat or continue?'

More than half of the enemy forces had gone up in flames and the ones that survived were starting to backpedal. They had lost their morale and started deserting, even when their commander was there a loss of more than half their troops in one go was devastating. Perhaps if their leader was better he would be able to rally his men once again but instead, he started attacking some of the retreating soldiers.

This worked to an extent as he was able to halt some from escaping but several had scattered to the sides where he couldn't reach. From a force that numbered about two hundred strong, they were now closer to his forces. They had not even been able to breach their walls or placed any of their ladders and temporary bridges to get through the moat. It didn't take a genius to realize that the battle was over and they wouldn't have enough troops to get inside.

"Cowards! All you can do is hide behind your walls and use vile magic. I challenge your leader to a duel, does he dare to face me in single combat!?"

To Roland's surprise, an unforeseen element emerged in the trial. His forces had managed to push back the enemy by just guiding them into a trap. He had lost none of his troops while the enemy had suffered a loss of seventy percent. Normally this would be enough to end this encounter but this commander wanted to take him on as an individual.

'Interesting... could this give me a better grade for the trial if I accept it, or will it worsen it?'

Roland had not forgotten that this place was only a trial, everything here was fake and was made for a reason. This was just the first part of it and even now he didn't ignore the possibility of there being levels to it. His choice of not entering the fray was also dependent on what he thought the trial expected from him.

The basis for this conclusion was due to reading up on other tier 3 trials. If it wasn't something plain like defeating monsters or gaining an item from a castle it could have hidden checkpoints. Roland thought about what he was trying to be, an Overlord, someone that was supposed to lead a city while also crafting up a storm.

The latter part he performed by designing all the weapons for his army and also by making all the explosives. The first part was different, a lord couldn't just put himself in danger without a good cause, and his people depended on him to survive and perform his tasks. It wouldn't be hard for him to jump into the swarm of low-level puppets and kill them all himself. Putting himself in unnecessary danger if there were other ways to protect his lands would probably lower the hidden grade. If he was wrong then it would be fine as well, the only thing that he would lose was some sleep and all of his troops were still alive.

"How dare he call our liege a coward! Our Lord is not scared of anyone, he is the strongest of all the lords, not like yours that send out a footsoldier instead of coming to face us!"

"Hm..."

Roland noticed that the Aid that was with him started getting mad and slinging insults at the enemy commander. At first, he thought the wooden man would tell him to not engage with the enemy leader but it didn't seem that way. During the shouting, it was becoming clear that he actually wanted him to see his lord battle this man on the horse. To simplify things even further, after stepping forward and meeting the gaze of the wooden commander he was given a message.

Will you accept the duel from the enemy commander?

The trial was pushing him towards this confrontation. At the time he was given the option to refuse as his forces were winning but perhaps this was something that he could use to his advantage later. It was also an opportunity to see where this went and considering that his opponent wasn't that strong, there was no reason to refuse the challenge.

"I accept your challenge."

The moment he spoke those words a strange phenomenon started taking place. Outside his wooden fortress, a ring of around thirty meters in diameter started forming on the ground. Where before there were chunks of fallen wooden men a flat surface was being formed. All the bodies and mangled weapons were pushed outside. The ring started flashing a bit as if it was trying to send some kind of signal and this prompted the enemy commander to move toward it and dismount. After grabbing his weapon of choice which was a large halberd he entered the ring where he began standing without moving a muscle.

'I guess that's the battle arena, it doesn't look like the other soldiers will attack me while I'm in there...'

During this week Roland had worked without rest to create a lesser version of his armor. There wasn't much to work with as what he was left with was just a pair of steel gauntlets, reinforced steel boots, and an old iron breastplate that had already been there before. It allowed him to use some lesser spells but should be more than enough for his coming battle.

'They all are acting a bit strange...'

His own forces opened up the gate for him without Roland even needing to order them. It was as if he was inside a cinematic that he couldn't interact with after accepting the challenge. The ring began to flash a bit faster which made him believe that he only had limited time to get to it. Perhaps if he waited for too long the duel would be halted and it would look as if he got cold feet.

“Foolish Lord, this will be your resting ground, your head will be proof of my loyalty to the true lord of these lands!”

“Hoh, is that so? You really think you can beat me with those stats?”

Name:

Wooden Commander L 105

Classes

Wooden Warrior L 25

Wooden Soldier L 25

Wooden Soldier Captain L50

Wooden Commander L 5

His opponent raised his large halberd and was ready to charge. Roland took a moment to look at the levels and realized that this would be the next upgrade to his own Captain. The wooden puppet before him was close to his height and a lot more robust looking. He was even wearing a full set of half-plate armor made of steel. One of the reasons that he accepted this challenge was the gear this unit was wearing which would let him enhance his fighting capabilities even further.

“Have at you! Become my stepping stone!”

“Yes yes...”

Roland pointed out with his hand at the large wooden soldier that started charging at him. Before he could come anywhere near the new lord of the fort a blue bolt of energy shot forward and even though a deflection was attempted with the large halberd, the weapon buckled under the pressure before being slammed back.

It wasn't much of a battle really. The level difference was too high and Roland never intended to let the wooden puppet get near him. In a battle of brawn against magic, magic usually came out on top when a mage was able to cast their spell. In Roland's case where he could circumvent chanting this battle became target practice. In under a minute the duel was over and the puppet's head exploded from a well-placed mana arrow to the face.

Congratulations on your victory, the rewards will be presented to you now.