

Runesmith 315

Chapter 315– Tier 3 Trial Part 11.

“My Lord.”

“Is it time?”

“Yes, they are waiting.”

“Good... let’s get this over with.”

Roland looked at the large room with various decorations in which he wasn't alone in. Time continued to pass and everything moved towards the last confrontation with the Woodlanders. Everything would be over after the final battle was over, that is if this trial didn't throw any more wrenches to stop his plans.

Even though this place wasn't as big as the real world, for one person it was gigantic. More than a year had already passed since he started this little game. Considering that he was forced to take several time skips, more than a couple of years in trial time had gone by. His faction had become a small country with an actual force that reached into the multiple thousands. With this army, he was now planning to head towards one location where the tides would shift.

‘Things haven't been going too well lately and convincing those Foresters took a while. If I knew I'd be forced to do those things I would have chosen violence instead...’

Roland wanted to save up on some resources by going into an alliance with one of the remaining nations, the Foresters. This was a resounding success as after aiding them with some of his resources they were able to drive away their enemies and were actually grateful. A pact was formed between him and this nation to clear up the Woodlanders that soon had control over half of the map.

There was one tiny thing that he didn't realize when he was forming a pact. He did not think through what an alliance entailed when he made it. His original preconceived notion was that he could automate everything as this had been a trial. However, he had been mistaken and his presence was actually required at a few venues where he had no idea how to act.

“Hear ye, Hear ye! Today in our nation and throughout the lands, we are celebrating the union with our lifelong allies, the great Timberlings. Lord Commander of the Timberling nation has joined us on this grand and joyous occasion...”

‘Uh... how much longer is this guy going to announce my entrance...’

At this moment he was standing behind a closed door with two wooden soldiers on his side. His usual armor wasn't on as he was forced to switch to more traditional attire. This day he had to attend something that resembled a royal ball. Something like this was somewhat above him as he had never taken any training in noble affairs.

His only reference was some conversations with his family members in the past he overheard or some of their own training. Most of his sisters were somewhat forced into attaining noble get-togethers where they were expected to look good and act as proper ladies. The men on the other hand usually had this mentioned somewhere during their knight training. Even dancing lessons were a requirement as the noble sons and daughters had to take part in what to him was a diplomatic charade.

“Without further ado, let me present you the Lord Commander of the Timberlings!”

‘Uhh... I guess this is my cue...’

The wooden people in this trial referred to him as Lord Commander just as the class of the leaders of each of the factions. It was the same for the Foresters, their leader was just the Lord Commander of the Foresters. The large door was opened for him and Roland took a few brazen steps outside into the large open ballroom where he was on top of the stairs.

“Greetings people of the Foresters, I am honored that you would accept my presence.”

‘Ugh, they are looking at me in a weird way...’

Roland was presenting his speech that he was forced to run through one of his Aids. Luckily they were competent enough to write it out for him. With his heightened intelligence it didn’t take much time to study it. The only hard part was presenting it in a competent way without stuttering or mispronouncing anything. He had even gained a new skill while he was practicing before it which made things easier.

Lordly Articulation

Skill Passive

Better’s the ability to physically move the tongue, lips, teeth, and jaw to produce sequences of speech in a more regal and noble fashion.

The skill literally made him into a smooth talker. It even helped him come up with more posh-sounding words and replace the ones that he commonly used. He had previously heard of the regular articulation skill which a lot of public speakers leveled up. The Lordly variant was probably due to his Lord Runesmith class or perhaps the Overlord variant.

This was also part of the trial, becoming an Overlord seemed to take noble diplomacy into account. By allying himself with another faction he was given more work. Just like this time he was waving at the people down below and shaking the hand of the Forester Commander. Something like this was certainly out of his comfort zone but thanks to everyone appearing as a wooden person, it made things a lot more bearable. The speech didn’t have to be the best and after finishing it everyone began clapping.

“Lord Commander. I must thank you for accepting the betrothal proposal.”

“Make nothing of it, Lord Commander. It was required to tighten the bonds between our two nations.”

The leader of the Foresters spoke out and the conversation between the leaders finally started. There was only one reason that he made the journey here. The war was upon them and he needed all the help that he could get. A treaty was already signed between their two factions but this didn’t mean that everything was set in stone. Roland was aware of the possibility of betrayal and this is what he was hoping to avoid by coming here.

Not much had been explained to him besides all of the basics but he was somewhat confident in figuring out how this place worked. There were some hidden numbers considering his approval rating with this foreign nation. If he was able to keep this number high then the chance of betrayal was quite low.

He had invested time in cultivating a relationship with this faction in several ways. One was the more basic one by sending in resources or aid in the form of soldiers against their enemies. Then there was the whole side with the nobility, one tried and true method was by marriage. Some of his commander units had been placed on the wedding table and been instructed to form bonds.

Roland didn't like this way of functioning between nations but at the moment he could not find a better alternative. The only way of keeping a healthy relationship with the foresters would be by offering even more resources instead. The marriage between wooden people didn't really concern him as he could look past their fate of being forced into a political marriage.

Perhaps this was how all the kings, emperors, and nobles saw their own people. Nothing more like wooden men and women that could be sold? This was beginning to be the reality of this world and this test that he was part of. While he didn't like it, this was the best way of getting through this trial. The ties in marriage would keep everyone together and to make things even worse he was actually offering himself to a similar fate.

"Will you accept those terms?"

"Yes, if you aid me in defeating the Woodlanders I promise to make this place into one nation with our two factions on the forefront."

"I see, then I will leave my daughter in your care."

Roland had trouble keeping his face in check while shaking the hand of this wooden man. It wouldn't be strange if all the Lord Commanders had them on their side if the time for diplomacy came. To make a deal with this one nation and save up on resources he had offered his own hand in a political marriage. If they were victorious he had promised to make the Lord Commander's daughter the next Queen of these lands with him as the king.

This would make this nation dead set on winning this war and betrayal almost impossible. The Forester faction had no way of being victorious on their own and knew well that the Woodlanders would show no mercy. They had already conquered the faction that was directly opposed to them and was now pushing for world domination. Their best bet was this alliance which would end with them all becoming one strong faction.

'They won't actually force me into going through the vows after it is all over, right?'

For the time being the betrothal contract had only been signed away on paper. Only after the enemy troops were defeated and their leader was dead would the ceremony be taken. His hope was that at that point the trial would be over. If it was not then he at least hoped to be able to fast forward through the wedding night. He did not want to even imagine being forced to go through with the deed in such a situation. The person he was promised to was still a wooden puppet with a drawn-on face that lacked most emotions.

After putting his own head on the line for victory the party had ended. Soon after he was placed in a meeting room filled with various generals from his army and the ones that were aiding them. His vassals were also here but they weren't getting as good as a deal. They were more a subservient state than a real partner like the nation of the Foresters.

'My own forces number around ten thousand, the Foresters have around six thousand and three thousand from the Kindlings... Will this be enough?'

Everyone crunched the numbers and his side had almost twenty thousand units at their disposal. The Woodlanders on the other hand had around thirty thousand which put him at a disadvantage when it came to pure numbers. However, this was not the extent of his power as the enemy faction didn't have a runesmith at their disposal. They were limited to equipment that could be purchased or crafted by regular blacksmiths and regular magical units like mages.

'The spider drones and tanks are crucial to our victory, I must not let them get damaged during the skirmishes...'

It seemed that a lot hinged on his creations that shifted into larger war weaponry. Battling monsters was a lot different than soldiers that were part of an army. When facing opponents in cramped dungeons weapons needed to be more compact but when out on the field of battle, this wasn't a necessity. When large numbers of soldiers clashed against each other, weapons that could cause widespread destruction were brought to the forefront.

The few large metallic spiders that he outfitted with large cannons were part of it but they were still hard to manufacture. Instead of using bulky golems, it was better to use all the manpower he was given. Gunpowder was nonexistent in this setting and usually, canons were replaced by mages that could cast spells with similar destructive power. This was the case here and even Roland had his own regiment of war mages at this point.

This left the old archers in a bit of a bind as their ranged skills paled in comparison. To alleviate this problem he decided to create a cannoner regiment that used his own runic cannon variants. Normally such weapons would require a lot of mana fluid to even operate but with many of his generators creating batteries each day, he had built up quite the reserve.

It did seem that the trial was giving him an advantage in the field of crafting. The equipment of the enemy was around the same level that his fully leveled blacksmith buildings could create. The only true difference was their numbers of thirty against twenty thousand which didn't put the odds in his favor.

During the conquest of the three territories, Roland paid as much attention to his main enemy. He calculated that if he went with the full conquest route he would have probably had fewer troops to command than he currently had. Only thanks to conferences with his new allies were he able to create a better chance for himself. It was as if the trial wanted him to follow this path of balance without swaying the pendulum too much into one side.

While he wished to use his crafting advantage as much as possible, his enemies would not allow it. Soon they pulled together all of their forces and attacked the borders of the Foresters. It was a massive push for their capital city which without Roland's help would not be able to hold out.

Now, he had a final decision to make. Either he could keep to the contract and help his allies or he would offer them up on a silver platter to gain an advantage. It would have been possible to let the Forester capital fall while he himself invaded the lands of the Woodlanders. Normally this would force them to backtrack with their armies that would have been tired from the siege. There existed some spots that would be good for an ambush and even others for a guerilla tactics approach.

Then there was a secondary tactic that was somewhat more gruesome. While the Woodlanders were invading the Forester's main capital he could rain magical attacks down on them all. With enough firepower, he could potentially bury the enemy leader in the ruins of their castle. That is if he took the bait which wasn't set in stone.

However, there was one thing that he had to consider, the Lord Commander of the Woodlanders was making the push. This trial put a focus on the commander units that when defeated would create chaos in the midst of the entire faction. If he managed to take this unit down victory was more than assured.

'I can end it with one potential battle but I'll have to meet them on the field myself... it would be the end of all of this...'

After spending so much time in this world he was still surprised that he was managing to hold it together. This was certainly not for people without an iron will and persistence. It was as if he was stuck into another world entirely without another real living being by himself. He was alone against the world, somewhat similar to his arrival in this world of swords and magic.

Perhaps thanks to his prior experience he had been fine with this place but slowly it was becoming daunting to his very soul. The more he spent here the more he wanted to return to the place he called home. The closer he got to the end of this test the more Elodia's face showed itself in his dreams. Even Bernir and Armand with his silly shenanigans made their appearance, at least when he spent time with that idiot it was never boring like it was here.

The wooden people could hold conversations but they were nothing more than cold automatons without any real feelings to speak of. The more he was forced to converse with them, the more he feared that he was becoming more like them. Perhaps this was what would have become of him if he didn't find some companionship but now he felt like this fate would not be part of his future.

'I'm not sure that a proper Lord would do a thing like betray his allies. It could be possible that if I do that, the trial will make it harder for me to finish it.'

Just like back when he bunkered up and made his first city into an almost impenetrable fortress, a similar result could transpire here. What if the Lord Commander of the Woodlanders made it back into their main faction region? Roland already examined that place and it was a natural fortress. Even if he could defeat the somewhat tired army he would take a huge blow to his own forces as well.

The more honorable thing to do would be to face the enemies out on the open field with all of his allies present. A word of an Overlord should probably not be taken lightly and breaking those words would perhaps disqualify him from the race. Sometimes these trials could be won by other means than force. Obscure ideas like honor and humility did appear in them from time to time.

'Should I risk it or not...'

Roland wasn't sure but when thinking about what this trial was truly about, this path seemed like the one toward victory.

"Well, a proper Lord should stay true to the word that they give and not betray his subjects. They are allied with me so I should probably consider them as my own people too..."

A decision to take up arms formed in his head and soon enough he was looking at where the main battle would take place. After spending so much time here he didn't really even need to form a strategy. Everything was already set in stone and the time for the final battle was upon him.

Chapter 316– Tier 3 Trial Part 12.

'The scale is different when you see it up close, I can't imagine how this would look if the whole army from the kingdom went to battle...'

Roland was impressed by the sight of the wooden soldiers standing in formation. His side amounted to around twenty thousand while the opposition thirty. The enemy nation of the Woodlanders was slowly leaving a large forest area and gathering on a large plane where the final fight would be taking place.

Most of the soldiers were wearing full plate armor which hid their wooden parts from showing. The mounted units were the most armored and to the sides of the formation as he didn't want to impede their mobility by sticking them into the middle of the formation. In the front was a regiment of archers that were behind a temporary barricade. This was assembled by a row of carriages that carried a lot of rubble and would protect them from being rushed by cavalry.

All the golems that he had created during this whole war were also here. This amounted to ten spider tanks and thirty smaller spider drones. While their numbers weren't large, they could produce a lot of mayhem on an open field with so many enemy soldiers. Then besides these runic machines, some of the archers were equipped with portable cannons that were very similar to modern mortars.

'How much time did I spend making the admonition for those?'

His eyes twitched a little bit as he saw his soldiers bringing out the mortars. They used proper ammunition that consisted of either regular cannonballs or mostly hollow runic variants. The latter were the ones that he forced himself to produce whenever he had the chance to. While both sides had mages to assist in ranged warfare his side was somewhat more advanced.

When looking at the numbers the enemies seemed superior in many ways. The composition was similar and the formations they took were not that much different. What would normally be the deciding factor was the equipment or the strategy if there were no other advantages. Considering that they were going to battle out on an open field the other side was more likely to be victorious.

'There wasn't much time to prepare but we did manage to set a few surprises for them, but will they just take the bait?'

If there was an option he would have liked to have several days to plant explosives all over the place and then just have the enemies rush into them. This tactic had worked for him even back in the real world where he could trap thieves and even a powerful Lich. However, without being able to use the bunkering up method he needed to think of something else. For this, he decided to use more modern ways and use the ranged advantage along with his ace in the hole, the runic batteries.

'It won't be long, I should start moving too.'

While he was the commanding officer of this whole army it didn't mean that he would be passive. Roland was the most important part of this whole plan as his job was to keep the enemy leader busy. His large form was coming into view and was it something that gave him the shivers. Even though this was

his first time really seeing the Woodlander Lord Commander, the large mace he was holding had left an impact.

It was the last thing he remembered of the confrontation during his first trial attempt. The Lord Commander was still a wooden person but the large black armor that he was wearing made him look like the end boss from a video game. He strutted out behind a large regiment of mounted units that he towered over. His steed looked a lot bigger than the rest and was also wearing armor over its black wooden figure.

'He must be at least as big as the Guild Master...'

The distance between the two was too great to do an identification check of his level. But considering that this was his last enemy it wouldn't be strange if his level was over a hundred fifty. His body was covered from head to toe by that menacing-looking armor and his weapon of choice was a huge mace that would normally be used in two hands. On his left side, he also had a large tower shield that seemed to be engraved with some magical symbols.

'I guess he also has some form of magical armor, I should expect him to have some protective spells that might be able to reflect my own spells, this probably won't be easy.'

There were several things that he had to think about when facing this enemy leader. One was that in his previous attempt, he was able to defeat Roland already. It was probably not a fair duel but this wasn't one either. If it was possible then it would be best to isolate the black knight away from his aids to take him out. His armor was a swiss army knife of magical weapons that could adapt to most situations. Even if something had magical protection, it was possible to use outside means that went around such defenses.

When looking at the form of his enemy he glanced at his own steed. For some reason, he was able to level up his own riding skill. At first, he wondered if he should design his own golem that he could ride but due to time constrictions he decided against it. Something like a bike or armored vehicle sounded nice but designing it and making it with his current skills would take multiple months of work.

Instead, he decided to just upgrade his horse's armoring into a runic one. While the horse was not capable of casting any spells, this didn't matter. Roland had the required skills to use runic devices from a distance. He could command his golems and also activate the small turrets on the horse armor he made. They were powered by runic battery packs that made his horse into a moving cannon. Some of his cavalry commanders were in possession of similar armoring which could aim at its own as a golem could.

Just like with all of his creations, they were limited by his time here. Luckily in the ending stages of this trial, everything had become somewhat automated and he could focus on bolstering his runic war machines. If there was more time or some help from other runesmiths, he could see each and every soldier wearing armor with a runic battery and a shoulder-mounted cannon as a side weapon.

There were many ways of integrating his magical weapons into an army and if he reached tier 3 and was capable of miniaturizing the batteries, then he could see it as a change in magical warfare. As it stood now there was no true renewable energy source and using mana fluid out in the field wasn't that safe. Just like he once tried with his golem the fluid or its crystallized form could get overloaded and explode.

His batteries could be created in metallic form and depended more on the quality of the runes with no danger of an explosion happening even if they were struck during combat.

'I guess I'll think about that stuff when this is over.'

"My Lord, the enemy is on the move!"

"I can see that, they won't even try to talk this through, seems like they were really designed to just be a force of nature..."

Roland spoke out while one of his commanders informed him about the enemy moving forward. His allied commanders came from the Kindling faction that he conquered and the Foresters nodded at his words before moving to their own forces. Everything had been discussed beforehand within a lot of meetings and it was up to him to decide on the right tactic. The trial didn't really force him to come up with his own but instead gave him the power to decide on the right one for the occasion. Now it was up to his decision to decide the fate of all these soldiers and if he would be victorious.

"Wait for them to get in range of the cannons!... Fire!"

He watched as the battle played out and it was quite a sight to behold. First of all, the war mages were assembled in a standard military battle formation. They were constantly casting spells to produce protective veils of magic around their soldiers. This somewhat protected them from the magical blasts produced by his runic spider tanks, mortars, and battle mages.

Yet, these spells weren't meant to last for long. They were good at blocking simple arrows but not large cannon blasts. Soon Roland was able to see some of the wooden men explode into large chunks and smaller splinters. If they were actual human beings made of flesh and bones the sight would probably be something that would haunt him for the coming nights. This was true war, it wasn't pretty and these wooden men were quite vocal about it.

'They aren't real, it's just a test made by magic, nothing more than an illusion...'

This fake representation of war felt quite real, some of the enemy combatants were quite loud in their moments of demise. Even though they were getting blasted they continued to pour into the range of the archers and even the few explosive traps that his army managed to place around this open space.

The battle was unfolding before him but it was not yet time for him to get involved. As the strongest unit on the battlefield, he needed to wait for his true opponent to make his move. If the enemy Lord Commander decided to run away then this whole move would have been for naught.

'Just as expected, he is going in... the rumors were true, he is supposed to be a battle maniac type.'

Before this whole scenario was played out he made sure to analyze what he was going up against. The enemy leader was hyper-aggressive and always surrounded himself with many powerful units. He also seemed to love getting involved in the fights he always steamrolled his opponents. Judging by his bulky size it was obvious that he was some kind of special unit that was good at close-ranged combat.

For someone like Roland that preferred his magical attacks to do most of the work, this was a troublesome opponent. If he managed to get in range, then he would be putting himself at a

disadvantage. However, he had his own advantage over this brutish knight that was at this moment swatting soldiers away like flies with that big mace of his.

'Well then, here goes nothing... Let's end all of this...'

His army charged to meet the enemies and he was right behind them. Roland wasn't sure why but he didn't feel as much fear as he expected. The scenes of the soldiers battling for their lives just to carry out his orders were quite vivid. Perhaps he had gotten used to all of this after regularly going from one battlefield to another or perhaps it was all due to his brain interpreting everything as an illusion.

The reason didn't really matter but without fear, his actions would not be impeded and he would be able to focus on the large black knight charging toward his location. To both his sides, two enemy wooden men with hook-like weapons attempted to forcefully dismount him from his horse. Yet before they were able to get in range they were blasted away by the small runic turrets attached to his horse's barding.

Even the ones that were able to deflect these blasts were pushed away by the thick magical shield that surrounded his entire body. The thick barding that covered the wooden horse was able to enhance its stats just like Roland's armor. While his speed advantage was apparent this was not a race, with so many bodies lying around and wooden soldiers in combat it was hard to maneuver around the place.

Some of the spider drones surrounded him as a layer of defense. Their magical cannons rained down at anyone stupid enough to get too close to the Lord Commander. Yet even with this much support soon enough he was swinging his pole weapon around to knock some of them away. The whole field had devolved into a massive melee with the ranged troops having to hold back their bombardment in fear of hitting their own side. Their main goal thus became to keep the magical troops busy.

Thus the time for the final confrontation was also upon him. A group of armored wooden soldiers flew to the sides as the enemy commander finally appeared close to him. Roland instantly activated both of his shoulder-mounted cannons to shoot fire-type spells at his foe. To his dismay the large wooden man clad in dark armor didn't react as he didn't have to. The fire arrow spells that collided with his armor were absorbed by something without producing damage.

'Mana dispersing shield? Isn't that a borderline tier 3 spell?'

There were several types of elemental shield spells. They had their strong and weak points which forced their users to adapt during combat. With his custom Runic Armor Roland was able to quickly switch between shielding effects depending on the situation. However, there existed a higher-tier spell that did all of that on its own. The mana-dispersing shield spell was able to break down the attack at its core. It was a universal shield that worked well against all elemental types.

'None of the spies reported on something like this, did he upgrade into a better armor before this fight, or was he hiding it for this occasion? Maybe my presence was a trigger for it to appear?'

Roland did his best at handling the intelligence unit of his army but even it wasn't perfect. It was possible for his enemy to have gained this special armor before this battle or that the trial decided to throw a monkey wrench before the test ended. Nevertheless, he had to win it at all costs and the shield was still beatable just like all the other spells, it would run out of mana to sustain it.

'If there is something I'm good at, then it's not running out of mana easily...'

First of all, came a bunch of marbles. One of his oldest classes, the Runic Mana Scribe, came to the forefront. In each of the round orbs, there was a small parchment with an exploding rune in it. While it might have seemed cowardly from the outside, he didn't see himself winning an upfront fight with the monster he was fighting. As he examined his level he made sure to toss a handful of these exploding marbles at him while also barely evading the large mace he was swinging around.

Name:

Wooden Lord Commander L 200

Classes

Wooden Warrior L 25

Wooden Soldier L 25

Wooden Soldier Captain L50

Wooden Lord Commander L 100

At first it looked like some kind of bug. The Lord commander from the Woodlanders had a hundred levels in a tier 2 class which allowed him to reach a level that was above Rolands. Something like that would not have been possible in the real world or not even sought after. Yet his opponent was just created to be the last stepping stone for his trial. His stats were above Rolands and a direct approach was not possible but with the help of his various weapons, he would be victorious.

Thus the cat-and-mouse game between the two lord commanders had started. Which one was the cat and which one was the mouse was unclear but no one from the soldiers could really be of much help. Wherever the two ran to, magical explosions and destruction followed suit. Roland's magic created small craters while the giant mace from the Woodlander Commander tore into anyone that was stupid enough to get in his way. Soon enough the two had pushed through their forces to the side where there was no ongoing carnage.

"Shit..."

Roland had exhausted his explosives and even had to abandon his mount. The moment he broke through the active battlefield to one side a large mace came flying. It connected with the wooden horse and created a massive dent in the metallic armor it was wearing. The wooden creature was dead on the spot as various wooden parts of it just fell down to the ground along with its now motionless body.

Luckily his enemy wasn't doing much better. The dark knight's own mount was not protected by the same mana-dispersing shield. It had also drawn its last breath and collapsed right as its master had thrown the mace forward. To Roland's surprise, this weapon wasn't a simple battle implement. The moment the enemy commander raised his hand it was drawn to it. As if a big magnet was sucking it in, the mace flew back into his hand.

With a stomp of his feet, he produced a spike of earth that shot toward his approaching enemy. Yet with one swing of that giant mace, he was able to crush the hard magical rock that he produced. Various

other spells were activated but the brute continued to take all of them without even flinching, the magical shield seemed to be still working which gave Roland quite the scare.

'Hm?'

Suddenly when the distance between them was less than ten meters he noticed something. His mana sense picked up on it the moment he saw some of the magical flames connecting with the dark metal the wooden soldier was encased in.

"Took long enough."

He shouted out while seeing that his chance had finally come. The game around the battlefield was in place to slowly whittle down those magical defenses. Even the best magical gear had some type of limiting factor. Even his own runic equipment would burn through the metal or not work if his mana reserves ran out. His keen eye of the runesmith identified the material it was made of and by his calculations, the charges for the defensive shields were now at critical levels.

"I'm glad that you aren't the smart type, otherwise luring you over here would have been impossible."

After shouting out those words he pointed out with his hand towards the large armored enemy who was already charging at his location. The mace was close to turning his head into meat paste just like before. Yet before it could reach it once more a plethora of metallic cables shot out from the ground to entangle each and every limb along with the one holding on to the weapon that once killed him...