

## Runesmith 303

### Chapter 303: Tier 3 Trial Starts.

“Runesmith Overlord? Is this because I defeated that lich... but it doesn't look that insidious...also what is with this naming sense again, Master Runesmith High-Lord?”

Roland was stuck looking at the sprite that was ahead of the lengthily named Master Runesmith High-Lord class. Though it made sense that if the Master Runesmith was the base class, then the prestige variant had to keep the 'Master' part of the name. Then there was the Runesmith Overlord class that lacked this title and seemed to be in an even greater position.

There were creatures that were called Overlords in this world, they were high level tier 4 undead that towered over their own kind. The Lich that he faced came from the same family of monsters and could evolve into an Overlord. An Overlord was a high tier undead that could actually summon other Liches to do their bidding.

If a Lich was a city-level threat then an Overlord would be a kingdom-level threat. The number of undead soldiers he and his minions could produce was staggering. There were records of smaller countries being overrun by such undead monsters who then were only defeated by a joint effort that arrived from outside.

‘Was there some kind of hidden prerequisite that I managed to reach? Was it defeating the Lich by myself or just slaying large numbers of tier 3 undead monsters?’

This was a curious conundrum, if the Runesmith Overlord class wasn't there he would have instantly gone for the High-Lord variant instead. It was probably more of the same, a greater version of the Master Runesmith Class that probably added a greater multiplier than before while also allowing him to get greater Rune Mage-related knowledge.

Normally a regular runesmith wasn't that great at adjusting the 'runic operating system' that was hidden away within the runes. In reality, there weren't that many runesmiths like him that were able to adjust everything by themselves. It wasn't strange for others to get some help from a rune mage to adjust some settings before just copying the changed rune afterward. Thanks to his Runesmith Lord class that somewhat combined the two classes, he could easily learn the Rune Mage part.

‘Wait, I've been stuck thinking about the undead for too long, an Overlord doesn't have to be an undead monster, there were mentions of elite monsters appearing with this title...’

When thinking of an Overlord the undead type popped into most people's heads. It was one of the most known stories in this world so his mind drifted in that direction. However, something like an Orc Overlord evolution was also possible. It seemed that it was a very powerful evolutionary variant that wasn't limited to summoning undead creatures.

‘There was that one Orc Overlord terrorizing a region in another kingdom in the past, hmm...’

Roland tried to recall any information that he had about the Overlord monster variants. There was a handful in the past and all caused a stir in the countries where they appeared. The undead variant was a confirmed tier 4 monster but there was nothing to verify the other ones.

Then when it came to classes with this title, just as the Lord and High-Lord variants, there was no knowledge known to him. As always, this was a secret that most families kept to themselves and handed out on a need-to-know basis. Perhaps if he spent a lot of money at an information broker he could gain some snippets of data but Roland didn't expect there to be anything worthwhile. All the best bits would either be locked away behind a vault or sold off at an underground auction for a price even he wouldn't be able to afford.

'Doing more research won't help me much and just waste more time that I don't have...'

Knowing of the Overlord evolutionary monster variants which were known for their ferocity did imply its prestige. Going by the sprites on the screen this Runesmith Overlord class was superior to the Master Runesmith High-Lord class that he was actually trying to get. After maxing out on all the skills related to the previous Runesmith Lord class and maxing out his second tier 2 class he was finally able to unlock all the requirements for it.

This always went the same, the tips for the class were on the screen before him. One of them was the name which was quite obvious. Two choices were before him, The High-Lord class or the Overlord one seemed to be the way to go. While he did have the option to go with an upgraded version of a Runic Engineer it didn't seem to be better than a Master Runesmith class.

Perhaps if he managed to level up all of the various skills he received from the tier 2 variant a more prestige version could appear. However, time was running out and there were various other aspects of this change that he was worrying about, he needed to go with the best class he possibly could and those two would probably give him what he wanted.

The second tip was the way the sprite looked, it told a story of its own when the class was ambiguous. When he went with the Runesmith Lord class over the regular Runesmith variant it was the same. The sprite was wearing better armor and besides a hammer also holding a sword to indicate that the class was meant for battle.

The Master Runesmith High-Lord upgraded version for it looked similar, the armor looked a bit more intricate and the sprite was also more defined. Both the tier 1 and tier 2 class sprites looked like 8-bit while the classes that were tier 3 were 16-bit. They were slightly larger and showed a bit more detail in them. This was probably to symbolize the large change a person was taking when going from tier 2 to 3. It was a chasm that many people failed at crossing, a whole new world was waiting for them on the other side and now it was Roland's time to make that leap.

Both of the sprites were somewhat similar. Both of them were wearing some nice full-plate armor that was also equipped with a very lordly-looking cape. The High-Lord one had a blue one while the Overlord had a red one. Each sprite was equipped with a nice-looking helmet with a comb at the top, they reflected the colors of the capes but the Overlord came with something that looked like wings on the sides. In general, it was clear that the High-Lord sprite was copied over and then given some upgrades to create the Overlord variant.

'Judging by how things work here... the Overlord class might have the exact same bonuses and skills as the High-Lord class and come with some minor bonuses...'

While the sprites were walking he could see a faint glow on the pixelated armor that probably were supposed to be runes or magic effects. In the right hand, they were holding a large sword while in the other a hammer, similar to the Runesmith Lord class. Everything was just larger and more intricate to imply the upgrade.

Then the third and last tip that swayed him in the direction of the class of his choosing was the location on the screen. The further to the right of the evolution tree that the sprite was, the better the class was. He wasn't sure what this trial area used to judge the rarity or power of the class but it was something that usually worked out for him. Last time the Runesmith Lord class was in that location and now the Overlord one was there.

'It might be similar to the difference between a regular class and an advanced one at tier 2.'

His last acquaintance Myrtle the Cryomancer had one of those classes. One was an Ice mage while another was an Advanced Ice Mage. Both were on the same tier but the second one allowed a person to obtain greater bonuses to ice spells than the previous ones. The gain was around twenty-five percent and it could be similar in this case.

"Didn't expect a change to the plan at this point but here it is..."

When thinking back to the Runesmith Lord trial it was a combination of battling and crafting. Usually when a person chose a similar class then the trial was also more of the same. When going for a direct upgrade it was even more probable that it would be just a more advanced version of the previous text. The only problem was that he wasn't going with a direct advanced class but some kind of superior side variant.

"I won't know unless I try but there might be a price to pay."

Roland leaned back into the gaming chair that he spent too much of his previous life in. The choice was made but there was always a detrimental factor. The higher the class on the evolution tree, the harder the trial would become. He went from scribing one lesser rune onto some paper all the way to battling a swarm of monsters in an arena and then spending months building contraptions.

This one would be the hardest yet and he needed to mentally prepare himself for the task at hand. If he had some time to spare he would love to do more research and perhaps upgrade all of his Engineer related skills, however with the dawn of the new dungeon, power was something he needed.

For a moment he stood up from his seat and started looking around the small apartment he used to live in. There was nothing here to ease his mind, just a reminder of a life once lived and not fully appreciated. Probably if he was able to return to his old home now, he would do his best to quit a job where he wasn't appreciated or at least give his boss an ultimatum while working towards a new endeavor instead of playing video games.

'Working for eight hours, five days a week doesn't sound so bad anymore...'

After some pacing back and forth he sat back down and finally gave the Runesmith Overlord class a click. The virtual reality headset popped up just as always and he put it on quickly. His vision was overtaken by white light before he was taken to his new tier 3 trial area. At first, it was dark but in a moment a torch lit up on the side and was followed by many others.

“What is this... an underground warehouse?”

Torches on the walls started to illuminate the place he found himself in to reveal some items he was familiar with like, iron spears, and swords. Their quality wasn't all that great though and after taking one of the swords he could feel the dullness of the blade by just touching it.

“It's too small to be a warehouse, looks like an old garage where someone dumped off some unnecessary stuff.”

Besides the weapons, there were some old leather robes, boots, and various other low-quality items that would be seen used by Bronze adventurers. Could the trial be to restore these items to be graded? This would make sense if it was a pure crafting profession but somewhere he expected combat to play a role.

“Wait... what am I even wearing...”

These trials tended to give him new clothes and this time around he was wearing some kind of noble getup. The motif was red and the materials used would sell for quite a penny on the market. The shoes were also high quality even above what he was used to wearing in real life. On his chest, he also noticed some initials that implied his name.

“R.A.? Roland Arden? I guess the trial would know my real name and that I'm a noble, perhaps only a noble could even get this far?”

This world was quite unfair as it segregated people into casts even when it came to trials like this. It made things easier for the rich that had their forefathers pave the way for them while making it a lot harder for any upstarts.

“It's not strange for nobles to have their initials embroiled into their clothes but what is this for...”

After looking over this limited space he finally decided to go towards the thick wooden door at the end. There didn't seem to be any type of locking mechanism or keyhole that he could look through. Roland wasn't the most trusting person around so after grabbing the least dull sword around he injected it with his mana. This place lacked any sort of smithing tools to help him out but this didn't mean that he couldn't inscribe some runes on this piece of metal.

His level was quite high and so was his mana output. Depending on the material producing runes became easier. While iron was one of the worst when it came to retaining runes it was easy to work with. This wasn't all, some knives and daggers were also here, with the help of his rune copy skill they quickly turned into throwable bombs. If any monsters waited for him outside he would at least have something to fight them with.

Normally he wouldn't be this cautious before a trial had started but this was a tier 3 test. From what he heard these were a lot more serious than the previous one. He had read of some people failing within the first few minutes because they walked into some type of trap. Not all trials gave specific instructions and sometimes a person needed to find it out the hard way.

Thus when going towards the door that didn't possess any locking mechanism or a keyhole he kept his distance. One of the spears was used to pry the door open just enough so he could peek to the other side. From the angle he was standing he only saw a corridor that began lighting up with torches. There

didn't seem to be any traps there and even when he threw one of the daggers to see if something was activated, there was no reaction.

There was nothing there to kill him and his debugging skill didn't show any hidden runic traps either. Without dropping his guard he went into the corridor only to realize that it was incredibly short and narrow. Within a few steps, he arrived at a row of stairs that were leading up to another door. This one made his eyebrow go up as he noticed some light going through its cracks.

"Is that, daylight?"

There was a stark difference between light from a torch and from the sun. The brightness there implied that if he went through this door he would end up outside. This was quite surprising as all the previous tests took part in enclosed spaces but perhaps it was just a more modern light source or some magic at play. His last trial placed him in a modern warehouse so this wouldn't be strange if his old world and new one became mixed.

Besides the light, he also began hearing some faint noises. It sounded as if there was something out there. This might have been his first enemy so he started slowly approaching the exit. Luckily the cracks in the wood allowed him to look through this one to see something that he didn't expect.

"Huh? What is this place?"

At first, he was studded to see the scenery before him. Quickly he pushed the door open without being fearful of anything attacking him. On the outside, he was met with the sound of birds chirping and the annoying sound of annoying beetles that usually appeared during summer.

The moment he stepped through the door he felt the air becoming clear and warm. A blue sky with just a few clouds greeted him and he could feel the sun's rays hit his face. He was not in an underground dungeon or a giant warehouse, this time around he was in a vast world that looked similar to the real one. It was clear that this world was some kind of illusion but it felt so real.

However, there was one big difference that quickly became apparent. The sound of the chirping bird drew his attention to it and the moment he saw this creature he knew that he was still in the trial. The bird was made of wood, it looked like a puppet. It was very similar to one of those popular drinking birds that gamers liked to use to press the spacebar. It just also had a set of wings on the side and actual moving feet. It was somehow moving around and giving out a chirping sound, some others were even flying around the place he was in.

"It's the lord, he has come to save us!"

"Huh?"

While being stumped by the fake animals around the place something even more bizarre appeared before him. A wooden person shouted at him from a distance, it looked similar to the puppets he saw during his last trial and was now running towards his location. It was not the only one there as behind it two other slightly larger ones appeared who were wearing some rusted-over armor pieces and old leather armor that was hanging on a thread. What this was about he wasn't sure but after looking around the place he found himself in, he was quickly getting an idea about what his task would be...

**Chapter 304: Tier 3 Trial Part 1**

“My liege, you have finally arrived! Thank the gods, you are our only hope!”

Roland was still processing the thing that he was seeing. He had found himself in some kind of wooden fort. He came out on a slightly elevated spot and was surrounded by a wooden wall. From here he could see down towards a bailey. It seemed he was in some kind of old Fort on top of a motte. It was an outdated design even in this world and would usually be used only in some villages that didn't have enough money to create stone walls.

This was not the only problem as the strange three puppets that were coming his way were a lot more eye-catching. First of all the one that was shouting was dressed in a nice tunic and actually had a whole wooden face. The mouth could only move up and down like on ventriloquist puppets but its eyes and eyebrows were shifting around as well.

Then there were two larger ones behind it that were wearing old decrepit armor. In their hands, they were holding wooden spears with iron tips, just like the ones he found in the room he appeared in. Besides that, the lack of any moving facial features was apparent. All they had was a drawn-in face that made it look very uncanny. Quite similar to a nutcracker wooden doll that Roland was familiar with. When using his identification skill on the puppets he was actually able to gain some information about them.

**Name:**

**Wooden Soldier L 35**

**Classes**

**Wooden Warrior L 25**

**Wooden Soldier L 10**

**Name:**

**Wooden Lord's Aid L 25**

**Classes**

**Lord's Aid L 25**

This was sort of strange, as these puppets were clearly not real people. Instead of getting their levels and classes, he should have gotten the materials they were made from. These should be more similar to golems which didn't possess any classes when made by him. Monster golems on the other hand were identified with levels for some reason. This didn't mean that all constructs made by craftsmen weren't assigned levels.

It was possible to create a golem with a level assigned to it, similar to a monster construct. Roland didn't know the process behind this and was hoping to learn it when getting through this tier 3. This was the moment craftsmen were rumored to be able to create these more advanced variants that were accepted by this world's leveling system.

He theorized that it had probably something to do with the golem core and how it was created. Perhaps he needed to make his own from scratch without using monster cores that he erased. It could also

require more intricate artificial intelligence to be made as the monster versions tended to be a bit more advanced than the spider drones that could only carry out simple tasks.

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

“Prepare? Prepare for what exactly?”

After seeing the puppets coming his way and identifying their levels he started relaxing. At this point in time, a slap from him would turn them into splinters, there was no danger in interacting with them. The moment they arrived at his side the two wooden soldiers went down to their knees while the Lord’s Aid just gave him a bow. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that they were part of the new trial and this aid here would probably explain everything to him.

‘I heard that tier 3 trials could be quite complicated and sometimes take place at huge locations, this is probably similar...’

Before attempting this tier 3 trial he had read up on other high-tier trials like this one. There were many rumors and hearsays but the more information he gained the better of an idea he could form. Most of the time these tests wouldn’t be that complex, for instance, a Shieldmaster class would need to fend off monsters while protecting something inside their trial space. Most of the time they seemed to have to defend a passage but sometimes it became more detailed.

A Guardian was a tier 3 class that required a person to possess similar classes to that of a Shieldmaster but also have a Knight Class. One recorded trial had the future Guardian protect a group of NPCs that acted like people. It was recorded that they repeated a few sentences and reacted to some prompts and orders. The person needed to protect this group through a dangerous path that went through a dark forest, then a narrow bridge at a chasm, then through a mountain range, and finally arrive at a safe spot at the end.

It wasn’t said that the whole illusory world was real, perhaps straying from the path would take them to an invisible wall just like in the fake apartment complex his trials started at. Other records were similar, one particular assassination class had its test taker sneak around a whole small city and a castle. They needed to sneak into the sleeping chambers of the city lord and perform an assassination while evading the guards. It was possible to create various scenarios in these places and pit people against intelligent beings and not only mindless enraged monsters.

Even when it came to crafting classes, he had read up on tournaments inside the trial grounds. They were placed against NPC competition that they could even sabotage if they were able to get away with it. It gave people a lot of wiggle room to be creative in passing and underhanded methods were allowed. There were no morals in these fake words, if a person could achieve victory they would pass.

‘If these worlds can create human-like NPCs with intelligence... why do I get wooden puppets?’

Roland wasn’t sure why the wooden people had appeared again. The one that was the Lord’s Aid was a lot more animated and thanks to the moving eyebrows it was easy to understand what emotions he was going through. Perhaps his own understanding of the human mind was so rudimentary that the trial that was rumored to be a reflection of his own being had trouble creating real people?

Nevertheless, this was not time to think about his own disinterest in understanding others, he needed to get some information about this place. It was clear that he needed to prepare for something and this wooden puppet would need to fill him in on the details.

“My Lord, did you already forget? The enemy stronghold has declared war on us, we need to fortify our fortress to defend our people!”

“Defend our fortress, huh?”

Roland almost made a snarky remark about the claim that this was a fortress after not seeing much more than two meters of wooden walls. This place didn't look great and these wooden soldiers were certainly not strong. It seemed that he would need to defend this area from these attackers. He needed more information that probably this Lord's Aid puppet was here to give him.

“Tell me, who is attacking us, how many soldiers do they have, how many soldiers does our... ‘Fortress’ have, don't leave out any details about their equipment either, tell me everything you know.”

“As you wish My Lord! Do you wish to have the soldiers gather for an inspection?”

“Gather? Yes, have them assembled and ready for battle.”

“You heard the Lord, carry out the order!”

One of the wooden soldiers saluted by hitting his chest with his fist on the spot where a human's heart would be before storming away. Roland wanted to actually see his whole army together if he was to command it. It was better to investigate their weapons and gear to then come up with some kind of plan. The scenario seemed to be pushing toward a defensive battle but this didn't mean that it would end at it nor if only one wave of enemies would arrive.

Thanks to his noble heritage and not much to do in his younger life, he went through various books related to strategy. He was the sole lord of this place so it would make it easier to command the troops. There were ways of defending a castle or a fortress that he was knowledgeable about. First, he needed to learn about the topography of this location. If this fortress was built into a mountain it would have made defending it a lot easier for him.

‘This isn't that good... there are multiple places that we can get attacked from...’

The wooden puppet stuck close to him while he went around the whole compound. Everything looked like this place was stuck in the iron era of metallurgy. All that they had to work with was pig-iron which was used for tools and regular iron they outfitted their army with. Though Roland wasn't sure if he could call the wooden puppets he had an army yet.

This area had no real natural fortifications, the only thing keeping the invaders out would be the waist-deep moat and the two-meter or so wall that was made from logs that were tied together with some low-quality rope. If he gave it a punch with his current stats he would probably be able to make a hole in the wood or just directly push it down with one hard charge.

There was a lot of wiggle room in this place as it was quite spacious. Many empty plots of land stood everywhere as if waiting to be built. For the time being there was a handful of buildings that he had access to. First off there was a town center that as the name implied was placed in the middle of this city

fort. Inside there was even a wooden villager that was just mindlessly standing around without doing anything interesting.

There was something that looked like a market but only a single wooden merchant was there peddling some wares. When looking at the laid-out items he spotted some crafting materials and even better weaponry. After approaching the merchant a system prompt appeared before him, similar to the one that he was used to but with actual options that he could interact with.

“Aid... how much money do we have?”

“A hundred coins My Lord.”

“I see... can I purchase the items from this merchant?”

“Certainly My Lord, I’m sure you’ll make the right decision when investing our limited funds!”

It seemed that he had entered some type of strategy game this time around. He could see an icon of a sack filled with gold in the upper right screen when interacting with this merchant. There were items like longswords made from steel and iron here and he could buy them in bulk. However, there were also crafting materials that when put together ended up being cheaper than buying a fully made weapon.

“Let's go to the Blacksmith.”

Besides the Town Center and the Market, there were the Barracks where all the soldiers were stationed. It was the only military building in this place that he would be visiting at the end to check up on his soldiers. Before that he wanted to look through the building that was closest to his specialty, smithing.

‘There is one blacksmith here but do they expect me to automate everything?’

Roland was a bit confused by the setting of this whole trial. It was as if the Overlord part of the class was taking over the scenario here and left the Runesmith in a ditch. Normally he expected to be at least crafting some of the weapons but after checking some things he finally found his answer.

‘I see... so that’s how it is.’

The smithy had its own window where he could just tell the Blacksmith to create weapons and armor. However, this Wooden Blacksmith was more like a factory robot. It only took an existing item designed and produced a copy of it. After fiddling around with the settings he managed to discover that he could design his own weapons and armor.

‘So... I can either automate this by buying steel weapons and resources from the merchant or create better weaponry myself. I bet everything I buy at the merchant will be of inferior quality to what I can make or it will cost a lot more to manufacture a store-bought sword...’

The world ranked its items from lowest to highest, it even gave runes their own ranking from lesser to legendary. He was still a runesmith and it didn’t seem that this assistant blacksmith was capable of inscribing runes either. From his perspective, there were two ways he could go about this to achieve victory. Either he made all of it himself or he automated part of the process while spending his time on other things instead.

‘I guess this is the hard part, how should I spend the limited time I have here...’

It seemed that he would have to inscribe runes on any of the swords by himself before his army could use it. He could also do the same with the weapons but it was clear that it was better to let the wooden blacksmith perform this task instead. It could copy a design he produced and with his current smithing skills he should be able to at least produce a high-quality sword from the materials that he could obtain.

'I won't be able to make anything more than steel weapons, would it be possible to equip those wooden soldiers with runic wands?'

This reminded him of the first smithy that he was using after achieving his Runic Blacksmith class all those years ago. It wouldn't be hard to use the tools here but before he got to work he needed to take care of other things. The trial was forcing him on multiple fronts and he would need to find out the best ratio for it. One was being the city lord here and taking a similar position to Arthur.

Then he would need to craft the best possible weapons and armor for his troops if he had enough time. Finally, when the time to defend these walls came he would probably also need to join the battle. The wooden soldiers that he saw were quite low leveled and weak. It wouldn't be strange if they got instantly massacred by whatever attacked them.

"So this is it?"

"Yes, the finest soldiers that the Wooden Stronghold can offer, please give them your orders my liege!"

He finally arrived at the barracks. Behind it, there was a large training ground where he could see some of the wooden soldiers training against dummies made of straw. It didn't look that great, there were fifty wooden soldiers on the field with only one of them over the level of fifty.

**Name:**

**Wooden Soldier Captain L 55**

**Classes**

**Wooden Warrior L 25**

**Wooden Soldier L 25**

**Wooden Soldier Captain L5**

Roland was also greeted by another window that presented him with the levels for his soldiers. There was no need to even use his identification skill when going through this transparent console. The soldiers varied in levels and experience, some of them didn't even go through their second tier 1 class. When scrolling through the various panels he also noticed that he could assign them training.

'So I can choose their evolutionary path?'

To his surprise, there was one Wooden Warrior at level twenty-five that had a plus sign next to its name. After clicking on it he was given an option to upgrade it into a Wooden Soldier. This wasn't all as there were other options some were grayed out, one of them was a Wooden Sword Soldier, and another was a Spear Soldier that probably specialized in those weapon types.

'Wait, there was a training window there... I can actually assign them a training regiment...'

Without asking for help from the Aid he managed to figure out what was going on here. All the wooden soldiers had their own skills and even talents. There was a sub-window that would show him their aptitude for certain weapons. At the moment he could only see three variables, swords, spears, and bows. Where the three things he was given and their aptitude were shown in letters.

'So F is probably the worst and if it goes up it gets better, probably similar to dungeon ranks, perhaps A or S is the best aptitude. I was never that good at strategy games...'

It became clear to him that this would not be an easy task. He was not someone that worked that well with others and now he would have to become a commander of a fort. It was up to him to decide on the path his soldiers needed to take and also give them the best equipment for the job. What would be the best ratio of spearmen to bowmen? He wasn't sure but he would need to decide before the enemy attackers got here.

'I still need to check out that wooden fort I came from, I think there was something like a lord's chamber, perhaps there is something to tie all of these things together, if I have to walk between all of these areas on foot it will take forever to get things done.'

Roland decided to postpone upgrading the one Wooden Warrior to another class, he needed more information about this system. Before leaving he assigned training regiments to each soldier depending on the aptitude for each weapon. Time was of the essence and he hadn't even fully explored this place yet. Becoming an Overlord seemed like it would force him out of his comfort zone but at this point in his life, he was used to it.