Wanderer 75

Chapter 75: Wings

A strange gelatinous liquid oozed out of the walls, the black droplets of sludge pooling at their base.

Bulky appendages rose from the tar-like substance, before solidifying, making metallic groans as they pushed against the floor. An army of obsidian golems slowly took shape, pulling themselves out of the swamp, each of them as tall as a man. Their features became increasingly defined over time, a series of shallow indentations forming on their surface, before ultimately lighting up in a dim Yellow colour.

'Holy shit! How many do we need to fight at once?!' Percy asked.

He lost count after thirty. Plus, the dark liquid was still pouring down the sides of the cube, showing no sign of stopping anytime soon.

'The small ones aren't a problem. Those at Green are the issue.' Gabe replied.

And just as he said that, Percy noticed a few larger silhouettes coming to life a couple rows back. Even while hunched over, they were twice as tall as the weaker variants, their long arms thicker than a tree's trunk.

One of the giants took its first step forward, inadvertently crushing a smaller golem under its fist, a series of bright green inscriptions lighting up all over its smooth surface. The others soon followed, each of their strides sending a tremor through the floor.

But Gabe was too preoccupied to worry about that right now. The first batch of Yellow golems was already upon them. As for Percy, he understood he'd only get in his host's way, so he relaxed, relying on Gabe to handle them.

And handle them he did.

Before the nearest golem reached them, Gabe's core lit up, as Percy watched a torrent of blue mana gush through their transparent arms. A bright flash emerged from their palms, soon expanding into a

fiery tornado, grinding against a dozen golems, their metallic frames melting like candles under the intense heat.

Seemingly unconcerned about the devastation, more of the constructs walked into the hellish flames, only to share the grim fate of their predecessors. By the time the fire died out, over twenty golems had been reduced to a second puddle, surrounding Gabe like a donut. Unlike before, a red-hot sheen coated the substance, which showed no intention of returning to life.

'Neat!' Percy was ecstatic.

The spell was a lot fiercer than expected. Of course, it wasn't his first time seeing fire magic cast by a Green core, but Gabe's flames looked different. Hotter too. He wanted to ask his host about it. However, he suppressed his bubbling curiosity, recognizing their situation was still dire. Gabe had used up a quarter of his reserves already, barely putting a dent in the swarm.

'Now what? You won't last if you keep going like this.'

Percy felt their lips part into a savage grin, as the ambient mana flowed towards them. At first, he thought Gabe was trying to recover a little before the next batch reached them, but he soon noticed that wasn't it. The mana didn't enter their lungs – or whatever the equivalent organs were. Instead, it gathered on their back, the region below their shoulder blades heating up. A moment later, another flash blinded them, a blue light reflecting off the smooth walls of the cube.

'What the hell?!'

Judging from its intensity, Percy guessed the new spell should have completely drained their core. However, he quickly noted he was wrong. It was still at 75%, not a single drop missing compared to a second ago. By the time the light died down, he realized they were hovering a few meters off the ground, a pair of wings flapping rhythmically behind them, holding them up.

'Are they fuelled entirely out of ambient mana? How is that possible?!'

Oblivious to Percy's questions, Gabe remained in that position a little longer, arrogantly staring down the golems below. Then, he tilted his body, flapping his wings more violently than before, diving with

great ferocity towards his enemies. He rolled in the air once, forming another fiery tornado, narrower but denser than the previous one.

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And…

BOOM

The blazing wings slammed down on the metallic floor, crushing and melting more of the golems, leaving a shallow dent on the ground. Percy felt one of their ethereal appendages crumble under the rough landing, but more ambient mana rushed to repair it. Not that Gabe gave it the chance, as he leapt towards the nearest golem, pivoting on his foot to spin, the half-formed wing slicing through it like butter.

Suddenly, a tall silhouette loomed over them, its shadow blanketing their vision. The first Green golem… it was here. Its massive fist descended, Gabe barely folding his one remaining wing at the last second, to shield their torso from the impact.

Half of it was torn off, as Gabe was sent sliding back. Their bare feet burned from the friction against the metal, the blood rolling in their chest, the blow having knocked the breath out of their lungs. Still, the wing had done its job, protecting them from any serious damage. And it was already recovering, as was the other one.

A wet discharge escaped their lips, as Gabe wavered for a second. While his wing had endured the brunt of the blow, his previous injuries weren’t doing him any favours.

Still, he regained his bearing a moment later, throwing a quick glance around the room, scanning the army of golems as his gaze briefly lingered on the bigger ones, memorizing their locations.

Then, he made use of his newly repaired wings, diving back towards the smaller constructs. Over the next several minutes, he methodically took them down one after another, this time making sure to avoid getting close to the taller variants.

Things seemed to be going well too. A while later, he finished clearing out the cube without any further mishaps, leaving only the Green golems standing. Luckily, they were too slow to catch up. The walls had stopped oozing sludge at some point too.

'What are we going to do about those?' Percy wondered.

As much as their situation had improved, he guessed the challenge wouldn't be over until they destroyed the rest.

Suddenly, one of the giants stepped in a pool left over from its molten brethren. The construct raised its massive arms, stretching them towards Gabe. At the same time, black tar began flowing towards its bulky legs, visible bumps travelling up its body.

More of the liquid accumulated in the outstretched limbs, as Percy watched them swell, in preparation for something nasty. Gabe was clearly expecting that, as he started running to a wall, circling a different golem, to use its body as cover.

But he was a moment too late.

The golem's hands exploded into a rain of black needles, pelting their location, trying to rip them to shreds. Sparks flew wherever they landed, most of the projectiles bouncing off the smooth floor, as some pierced through, lodging themselves in place.

Gabe raised his wing to block them, though it clearly wasn't going to last long. The burning appendage was already full of holes a second later, a couple shards having opened fresh wounds on their body.

Luckily, they managed to make it behind the construct a moment later, prompting the other to cease firing. Just in time too, as the remaining two golems reached puddles of their own, preparing to join their comrade.

'This… was how they got me last time…' Gabe explained between pants. 'I didn't know they could do this… so I tried to stay airborne to buy time… I was forced to terminate the challenge as soon as they started firing… but the damage was already done…'

Percy shuddered, picturing four of the golems shooting at once.

In any case, it was good they were better prepared, but that still didn't solve their immediate problem. Their "cover" was nothing more than another enemy. It was already slowly walking towards them, forcing them to step back, nearing the wall dangerously. They couldn't escape any other direction, as the other three were waiting for an opening to shoot. And to make matters worse, there was another puddle in the golem's path. As soon as it reached it, it would be able to unleash a barrage of its own.

Thinking of something, Percy moved a trickle of soul mana to their eyes. Gabe raised an eyebrow, but didn't say anything, letting his guest try this. Sadly, Soul Vision showed nothing. The constructs didn't have a soul he could target. In fact, they didn't have a mana core either. Apparently, they were powered entirely through their inscriptions, drawing mana from the cube.

'Any other brilliant ideas?' Gabe asked.

'Nope. You're the one who said to leave it to you.' Percy shot back.

'Whatever. I guess I'll have to hit them with everything I've got and hope it's enough…'

Percy thought there were more issues to solve than just offensive power… There was also the matter of endurance. Would their mana last for all four of the golems? Also, how would they reached the other three amidst the barrage of needles after losing their cover?

But he remained quiet, not wanting to discourage his host before they even got through the first hurdle. Shrugging, Gabe ran towards the approaching golem, in a rush to intercept it before it stepped into the pool.

A huge chunk of mana flowed out of his core, this time supplementing the ambient mana in his wings, causing them to burn even more fiercely than before. Gabe winced, as Percy felt the skin on their back blister from the heat.

And a moment later, Gabe stepped in front of the construct, pivoting on his foot as a white-hot wing cleaved towards the golem like a giant axe.