Wanderer 76

Chapter 76: Complications

The blazing spell made a grating sound as it clashed with the golem's fist, encountering far more resistance from the Green construct than it had from its lesser brethren. Percy felt a sharp ache in their back, the torque threatening to rip the ethereal wing to shreds. But it held somehow, digging into the material inch by inch, the dark metal slowly parting under the burning blade.

More ambient mana surged to repair the axe. Sadly, the same couldn't be said about Gabe's own mana, his core already dry. The wing gradually reverted to blue, much of its power gone. Gritting his teeth, Gabe didn't give up.

With a final push, he sent the upper chunk of the golem's arm flying, before delivering a diagonal slash to its torso. The axe had lost a lot of its heat and momentum, but it still managed to dig halfway through the construct's chest before crumbling into wisps of blue.

Exposed and at the golem's mercy, Percy braced for impact, fully expecting to get pounded to a pulp the very next second. Gabe must have thought the same, as he closed his eyes, preparing for the worst.

But nothing happened.

They reluctantly opened their eyes to see the golem's colossal frame still looming over them, unmoving. The green lines on its surface were already dark.

'Holy shit! I thought we were done for!' Percy said.

His host only nodded in agreement. While they'd failed to bisect the golem as intended, the final slash had still been deep enough to put it out of commission.

Yet...

Not giving them a chance to celebrate, the other three golems launched a joint round of fire, no longer concerned with the integrity of their fallen comrade. Gabe barely managed to use the golem's leg as

cover, but the relentless needles were already eating into the metal. It wouldn't be long before they reached them, assuming the corpse didn't collapse on them first.

'Shit! Bring the wings back! We need them!' Percy urged.

Heeding his guest's advice, Gabe pulled the ambient mana once more, igniting a blue flame under his shoulders.

'Now what?' Gabe asked.

'Push against the golem with your hands so it doesn't topple over! Wrap your wings around the leg to slow down the damage! And start taking deep breaths! FAST!'

Gabe's eyes widened in understanding as he followed the instructions. The golem's corpse was heavy, but they only needed to support a fraction of its weight to keep it balanced. Gabe was at Green, so his physical strength was just about enough.

The wings barely lasted a second against the torrent of shrapnel, but Gabe kept flooding them with ambient mana, to buy more time. And with their situation temporarily stable, he inhaled, sending a trickle of mana into the empty core, slowly refilling it.

Of course, this wasn't sustainable. At this rate the leg would be eaten through, or the golem would crush them before the core was even halfway full. Percy was racking his brain for a plan when something changed. Suddenly, the cacophony of the metallic rain eased slightly, seemingly taking pity on their eardrums.

'What happened?' he wondered.

'One of the golems must have run out of juice!' Gabe guessed.

Sure enough, a series of thunderous steps sent tremors through the floor, as the giant started walking around the room, probably searching for another puddle to use as ammunition.

‘This is our chance!’ Percy said.

‘Are you crazy?! There are still two of them shooting at us! We should wait until another one taps out!’ Gabe protested.

‘What if the first one recovers by then?! This might be our best shot!’

Percy felt their features twist into a grimace. Still, his host didn’t argue back, likely agreeing with his logic. He pulled his wings, hiding them behind to let them recover, allowing the needles to grind through the leg faster.

The half-eaten limb began to buckle, as the golem’s weight shifted, straining their arms dangerously. Their bones creaked and groaned, threatening to break within the next few seconds.

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Out of time, Gabe pushed some of his newly recovered mana into the wings, turning them white once more. A powerful flap sent him half-way across the cube, well on his way to the next golem. He’d aimed for the one not shooting at them, roughly estimating its location by the sound of its steps.

The other two quickly turned to him, as Gabe split his mana between the wings, using one to shield himself from the projectiles while aiming the other downward.

The golem barely raised its arm in time, but Gabe’s momentum allowed him to slice right through it. His axe carved vertically into the construct, splitting its head down the middle, before fizzling out at the base of its neck. And just like that, the second golem was dead, Percy and Gabe finding themselves behind new cover.

‘Cool! Let’s stick with this tactic!’ Percy said.

Their core was empty again, but with one less golem shooting at them, they had more time. Reforming the wings, Gabe hid behind a leg, coating it in a layer of blue flames. Then, he inhaled.

Or tried to.

It was only then they realized they hadn't escaped unscathed. The adrenaline had masked the pain, but now they noticed several needles had penetrated through their defences. Plenty were sticking out of their body, their left side resembling a porcupine. Worst of all was a shard deeply lodged in their lung, making it much harder to recover mana.

Percy was momentarily unsettled by the alien taste in his mouth. The flavour was metallic but, unlike the sweet undertone of iron, it left a hint of bitterness lingering at the back of his throat.

'Damn, you have to push through it, or we're done for!' he grimly told his host.

They couldn't damage the remaining golems with the wings alone. Without Gabe's own mana empowering the spell, they had no hope of cutting through the hard material.

Gabe nodded. Each breath hurt and, with only one functioning lung, it took way longer to gather mana. Still, thanks to the weakened barrage, they eventually managed to refill half their core.

Percy was ecstatic when another of the golems ran out of juice, though he couldn't help but frown a moment later. His host wasn't moving.

'What are you doing?! Go!' he urged again.

No reply.

Only then did Percy notice Gabe's condition had grown critical. By now, they'd lost a ton of blood, and their vision was blurry. His host lacked the strength to execute the manoeuvre.

'I don't think I can.' the latter said weakly.

While he had made it look easy, Percy understood it took a lot of focus to combine the two sources of mana. Reshaping the wings into weapons probably required some effort too.

‘What if I take over the ambient mana? Can you do the rest by yourself?’ he asked.

He still had no idea why Gabe had this ability, but he’d observed him long enough to figure out how to keep it going.

‘That could work, but we won’t be able to fly. It takes a lot of practice. Just focus on maintaining the wings and run towards the golem. I’ll take it from there.’

Without missing a beat, Gabe relinquished control of the ambient mana, passing the reins to his guest. It was a somewhat novel experience for Percy, but he quickly realized it felt vaguely familiar.

‘It’s a bit like when I create my clones! Are the wings Gabe’s bloodline? I thought those were exclusive to Remior!’

But he shook the distracting thoughts out of his head. This wasn’t the time.

Gabe soon added his own mana to the wings, reshaping them into a white shield and axe, as Percy sprinted towards the next target. More shards dug into the wing, but with only one golem shooting, the damage was more bearable. Once they reached the construct, Gabe swung the tattered wing to brush its fist aside, before slashing at its neck with the other one.

Its head landed heavily a couple meters away, as its inscriptions dimmed, making this one of their cleanest kills yet. Plopping down, Gabe rested against the leg, not even bothering to coat it with his wings this time. It would take the last golem ages to pierce through the cover by itself, letting them concentrate on recovering.

Every time one of them was on the verge of passing out, the other shook him awake, as they waited for the construct to exhaust the liquid pool by its feet. And finally – after what felt like forever – the golem stopped shooting. Not in a rush to exacerbate their wounds, they casually strolled towards it, delivering one last strike, ending the challenge.

‘Wow! We actually did it!’ Percy said. ‘Are you sure we can get healed now?’

‘We’d better… We should be eligible for more than that…’ Gabe replied, before falling to his knees.

Suddenly, the symbols all over the room lit up, as the cube started repairing itself. The remains of the golems – both the small and large variants – all liquefied, seeping into the floor. Even the shards sticking out of their body melted, trickling down their skin, as more of Gabe’s clear blood gushed out of the wounds.

‘Ugh… Couldn’t they be a little gentler?!’ Percy groaned.

A few seconds later, every last drop of sludge had disappeared, the cube’s surfaces having reverted to their former condition, with no sign of the previous dents and scratches.

“Congratulations! Wave 6 has been cleared! Calculating rewards…” the soulless voice was back.

“Awarded credits: 6000. Current balance: 28563.”

“Wave 6 is a special milestone. Bonus reward is available. Please voice your request. NOTE: Bonus reward is limited to the Green grade.”

“I want my body healed up completely.” Gabe strained himself to speak.

“Evaluating request…”

‘My goal was to ask for a tome on fire magic… I’m working on improving my spell… It’s such a pity to waste it on healing… Oh well… I suppose the tome won’t do me much good if I’m dead...’ Gabe explained.

However, Percy didn’t pay him any attention. He was busy thinking about something else. It was only now he realized their recovery might be riddled with… complications.

“Evaluation complete. The request falls well within the parameters of your reward. The excess value will be converted to credits.”

“Accumulating life mana. Healing begins in 6 rits.”

And that about confirmed Percy’s fears.

‘Shit.’