

We stood in silence for a handful of seconds, all three of us pretty stunned that we had so easily dispatched both of the golems.

"Huh..." Barry eventually said, kicking at the cracks formed by the partial emerging and subsequent death of the knarled wooden golem. "Guess we are a pretty bad match-up for them."

"Maybe, but that's only going to go so far," I pointed out, shaking my head. "It's going to get real interesting if we run out of spell charges."

"Yeah... good point," He responded. "Let's hope there are only... three left?"

I glared at him for a moment for tempting Murphy, before going to check on the golem Barry had burned, confirming it was nothing but ash and collapsed dirt. I patted Barry on the back, giving him a nod.

"Good job," I said. "You good?"

"I almost panicked there for a second," He admitted with a frown. "Stabbing it before it emerged didn't even occur to me."

"Relax, you can't expect to think of everything," I said, poking his shoulder. "You caught on quick, that's what counts."

I slapped his back again before jumping over the slight pit that had formed over the now-destroyed golem. I turned back to both Danny and Barry, gesturing further down the road.

"We can keep going for now, but when we run out of spells, we are going to have to test taking one down with just our weapons," I pointed out. "If they go down relatively easy, we can continue, but if they are as tanky as they look... We will probably have to retreat and return tomorrow with more people and magic."

That seemed to mollify both of them, and soon, we were heading down the dirt road again, heading for the barn. Our progress was slow, with Barry and I in the lead again and Danny behind us. With each step, the tension rose, as any one of them might trigger the next attack. Sure, the last attack had failed, but we had no idea what the next one would look like, or if it would catch us by surprise.

Sure enough, just a few dozen meters down the road, another golem attacked us. This time, it rose out from behind a wagon, one decorated and some sort of stopping point for a guided tour. It was overrun with vines, but I could make out some sort of plaque on the side of the wooden wagon.

Unlike the previous three golems, who had to form and pull themselves together before they could attack us, this one immediately just lumbered out from its cover, already swinging its arms at us. Danny and I stood back, covering Barry while he led the tangle of creaking vines back to the road and away from the mutated plants and trees. Once it was safe to burn, he did his best to get his spear into its torso. After thirty seconds of carefully dodging back and forth, Barry finally found an opening, lunging forward after a broad swipe to dump a flame blast into its glowing chest.

As the golem burned, breaking apart quickly, all three of us made sure none of the fire spread, kicking charred limbs and bits back into the road. The rapidly burning monster was reduced to charred, flaming chunks in just a few seconds, way too fast for it to be normal. Still, in the grand scheme of things, it was just one small piece of strangeness, and I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

When we finally approached the barn, we had slowed down a lot. All three of us were nervous, since it had been a few minutes or so since we ran into another golem. Eventually, when we reached our target, we slid behind some cover.

"How do we get in?" Barry asked, leaning against a bit of fence about fifteen feet from the front entrance. "There's gotta be a back door. Maybe that's clear."

With how close we were, it was impossible to miss just how tightly woven the vines were around the building. The large bay doors along the front of the barn were sealed shut, as was the smaller door beside it. Every window was caked in green vines, with most of the glass panes shattered. Despite that, the sheer amount of plant life pushing through them would make climbing using them to get in impossible.

"What are the chances we try to hack our way inside and are immediately 'Ambushed'?" I asked, Danny snorting from beside me.

"Near a hundred percent," He responded. "The only real question is what will be coming after us, and where from."

I stood slightly and looked around, trying to spot any abnormal growths, shaking my head when nothing jumped out at me.

"My guess is inside," I said. "They are going to come busting through the second we start hacking."

"So... I'll go trigger it," Danny volunteered. "I'll start clearing the door, and come rushing back when I hear anything."

I cursed and chewed the inside of my lip, before eventually nodding.

"Just be careful," I said in hushed tones. "Keep your ears open and focus on hearing them coming, over trying to break in, alright? I'm pretty sure whatever comes out is going to make plenty big enough door for us."

Danny nodded, taking a moment before stepping out of cover. He made his way to the front of the barn, stopping by the small door. After a moment of listening, the firefighter raised his Dino-dog axe and slammed it into the door, punching through the wood like cardboard. He took two more swings before stopping suddenly mid-swing. For a moment, I wondered what he had heard, before the sound of creaking, straining wood finally reached my ears. Danny turned to run, making it about halfway to us before almost the entire front wall of the barn *imploded*.

Chunks of red-painted wood flew in and around the interior, large slabs of the wall falling to the ground, almost immediately trampled by the monstrosity that had caused the destruction in the first place. Visually, the monster looked similar to the previous golems, with knotted, coiled vines pulling and bunching together to form their body. That, however, was where the similarities ended.

It had six legs attached to a large central body, which stretched up to form a torso. Four long, swinging arms built of thick vine attached to that torso, around all sides, leaving very little room open for attack. The entire monstrosity was twelve, maybe fifteen feet tall, way past double the height of the other golems.

"Holy fuck." Barrys said from beside me, just as astounded as I was.

I watched, my eyes wide as the lumbering giant stepped out of the barn, the ground shaking with each powerful step. It chased after Danny, who thankfully seemed to be faster than it, getting out of its range just as it swung at him. The brave man stumbled into cover beside us, cursing up a storm.

"Jesus fucking Chris! What the fuck are we going to do against this thing?" He asked, his eyes wild as he looked over our cover at the encroaching monster.

"We... we... we need to lose line of sight, sneak up on it, and destabilize it," I said, lagging for a bit before my mind finally caught up, quickly putting together a semblance of an idea. "Split up, stay out of range until you see an opening! Aim for its legs!"

We barely had time to confirm the plan before one of the vine arms smashed our cover to bits, forcing everyone to dive out of the way, chunks of wood flying. I scrambled to my feet, already running., I looked over my shoulder to confirm that Barry and Danny were both alright. I watched Danny disappear into a nearby patch of grass while Barry was heading for a chunk of the ruined barn wall. I headed to a large truck parked along the barn, overtaken by vines and growth. I barely had enough time to dive behind the already rusting vehicle before its cab was crumbled by another vine slamming down at me.

It seemed like it was focusing its attention on me.

I cursed and rolled to my feet, stabbing at the massive limb, brutally hacking at it, trying to cut through it before it could be pulled away. I had just sliced through a good two-thirds of it when the monster dragged it back, trying to pull itself out of my range. The movement proved to be too much, and the limb snapped, revealing that the corded vines formed around a pale green core, which was leaking some sort of viscous fluid.

Despite taking the attacks without complaint, the monster must have felt something, as the same creaking screech we heard from the smaller golems was now bellowed from the much larger monstrosity. Now, the sound seemed to resonate with my bones, making me physically sore, my ears burning as they struggled to handle the noise. I peeked over the back of the truck bed to see the massive golem reeling, its severed limb twitching around on the ground, kicking up dirt.

As I watched the monster struggle, I spotted Danny watching from the grass. Seeing an opportunity, he left his cover and charged in, dodging a wild swing to slam his axe into the closest leg. Not satisfied with a single blow, he expertly yanked his weapon free and hacked at the limb again, this time casting a spell through his weapon. While the snaps of electricity didn't seem to do much to the wood, they did seem to somehow enhance his strikes. With two more rapid swings, he managed to carve through a significant portion of the leg.

The monstrosity, seemingly finally recovered from losing an arm, turned to strike down at Danny, only to put too much weight on its limb. It cracked under the load, snapping out from under the monster, causing it to lose its balance and fall.

Danny, his eyes wide, looked up to the slowly falling monster. He turned and sprinted, thankfully having the presence of mind to go against the grain rather than run with it, diving out from under the massive creature's shadow at the last second.

As Danny scrambled to his feet and continued to run, I used the opening he made, charging up to the massive vine golem. Part of me just wanted to find a spot, stab it, and hope for the best, but something told me that wouldn't be enough. Sure, we had managed to injure it, but I wasn't sure that would be enough. We only had two fire spells left between us, which wasn't enough to whittle them down with minor hits.

I needed to hit something vital.

Remember the green glow that the other golems had been exuding from under their vines, and knowing that our current target was also glowing from within, I raced to its side. It swung wildly, still not recovered from the damage we had done to it, letting out the same awful screech. I jumped up the side, using a thick knot to pull myself up onto its torso, ducking just in time to dodge a swipe meant to knock me off.

I could feel it start to right itself, or at least try, as I raised my spear and slammed it down into its chest, casting the flame burst into its chest. Like it had on the smaller ones, the glowing embers of fire being driven inside the tangled mass of vines that made up the golem quickly overwhelmed the green glow. Vines burned and charred before my eyes while flames burst out and singed my legs. I was forced to step back as a large section of its body burned.

But it wasn't enough. After a moment, the flames died down, and while I had clearly done some damage, the green glow returned, though it was brighter now that I had cleared out most of what had been covering it.

"Barry!" I called out. "Get up here and hit its chest!"

The monstrosity was starting to sit up, somehow getting its remaining feet under itself. I slid down its front as it moved, barely falling out of place before one of its arms slammed where I had just been. I landed just above the limb Danny had broken, jamming my spear into its torso to help anchor me in place.

And just in time, too, as Barry jumped up, using its broken leg as a mounting point, leaping with his spear tucked to his side, his arm extended. With one hand on the base of my spear, I leaned down over enough to grab his arm and swing him up, ignoring the pain in my shoulder as I did. The young man kept the momentum, somehow finding the perfect place to put his foot to push himself up the monster's quickly rising torso. Despite the steep angle, he managed to make two steps upward before slamming his spear in as hard as he could, right in the center of where I attacked. With a shout, he cast his flame burst, his attack exploding just as mine had, but even deeper.

The creature wailed, creaking and screeching, swinging its arms and shaking like it was having a seizure. Barry and I were dislodged as the vines and branches that made up the massive plant golem started unraveling. Both of us happily abandoned our weapons as we jumped, rolling and scampering away, worried one of its limbs would collapse on us.

The monster slammed down to the ground, its chest and stomach still burning. Slowly, over the span of thirty seconds, its movements slowed and eventually stopped, as the fire spread further and further from where we had stabbed it. As we watched, Danny returned from his hiding spot, looking on with wide eyes, his face full of awe.

"What the fuck guys... how the hell?" He said, struggling to form words. "Like it was nothing!"

Barry snorted, shaking his head as he approached the creature's corpse, climbing it to retrieve his weapon, while I only had to get to its side, yanking my spear free.

"How the hell did you watch that and think any part of that was 'like nothing,'" I asked, testing my spear to make sure it was straight and undamaged. "Besides, you helped! Cutting off that leg was well done!"

"But, I mean... you just just climbed up on it!" He insisted. "No hesitation, just... like something from a movie."

"If I knew the answer, I would tell you," I assured him, shaking my head. "But why don't we focus on making sure this place is clear before we figure out how we got so good at being stupid."

"Oh god... Jessica is going to kill me if she finds out about this," He said. "It's the dragon all over again."

"Hmm... wonder if I could blame this on you too..."

Danny, who was clearly astounded by our casualness, simply followed us as we walked around the massive monster. I couldn't help but laugh at his expression, despite the fact that I was internally barely holding it together. I let out a long breath and, after a moment, focused on the task at hand, so we could finish the mission. I gave Barry, who had spotted my calming breath, a look before heading to the barn, ready to find our prize.