

Gabe coughs to get my attention. “To get back on topic. We got on this big yacht and began sailing to the US. During the trip, the Spirit taught us a lot about fighting. The first exercise we did was one where Linda would launch a spell at me and I would bat it away with Sun Eater. That was a good first test for an enchanted ax. Then, we moved to more interesting things.”

“You know, the Akashic device could let us do this part as a... training montage of sorts,” I say.

“Way ahead of you.” Gabe says. “James came by earlier and we recorded a memory of one of our training scenes on the ship.” He inserts a flash drive into the recorder. By now, the recruits have won their simulated battle, so Gabe links the recorder to the big screen in the observation room.

I turn my attention to the screen as it shows a video of a medium sized room with a padded floor. An old man whom I assume to be the Spirit of Adventure stands near the door as Gabe and Linda enter. Inside the room are about twenty, maybe thirty combat training golems armed with various weapons. I see swords, maces, spears, and a few exotic weapons such as nunchuks. The old man tells Gabe and Linda that they can’t leave the room until all the golems are defeated. He disappears from the room and reappears on the other side of the door, which is then sealed by a steel shutter as the golems activate and advance towards Gabe and Linda.

Linda readies a fireball in one hand and draws her pistol with the other. Gabe shifts to werewolf form and pounces on the golem with the biggest hammer. Gabe seizes the golem’s neck in his jaws, jerks his head sideways, and snaps the golem’s neck. The golem falls, but Gabe is swarmed by five golems and forced to the floor.

In the present, Gabe whispers, “What an idiot...” Beside him, Linda snorts just as the Linda in the scene yells, “Seriously, Gabe? That’s your plan?” She fires her pistol at the golems standing over Gabe. The rest of the golems turn towards her as spent brass falls from the pistol she holds in her left hand. The fireball in her right hand is now the size of a basketball and glowing red. Gabe stands. He’s been beaten and bruised, and his claws broken. He draws Sun Eater and moves toward Linda, hacking his way through the mob of golems. When Gabe reaches Linda, she throws the fireball at the remaining golems, incinerating them in an explosion of light and heat.

“Linda, I... what... how did you do that?” Gabe asks.

Linda smiles. “Any dumb-ass mage can make a fireball, but it takes skill to use one well.”

“Linda, what is happening?” Gabe cries. He and Linda watch as bits of golem that had been scattered in the explosion begin to draw together and fuse into one much, much, larger golem. At the same time, the broken weapons melt and reform as armor for the giant.

The huge golem seems to decide Gabe is his target. Gabe dodges. “If he hits me, it’s all over!” Gabe calls to Linda. “What do we do?”

“I don’t know! I don’t think a fireball is going to work against that armor!” Linda replies. She ducks between the golem’s legs. She fires her pistol towards where the golem’s genitals would be if it had any. The shot has no effect.

“What about that lighting spell you used before? It’ll get through metal right?”

Linda jumps away from the golem’s descending foot just in time to avoid being squashed. “It’ll get through the armor but the shock won’t last long enough to take this thing down.”

Gabe yells “Cast it anyway. I’ve got an idea.” Linda begins chanting in a language I don’t recognize. A crackling sphere of electricity forms in her hand. She hurls the energy at the giant golem. The orb hits the giant’s armor. Sparks shoot through the armor. Bolts stream from the vambraces and

greaves before the orb bounces away. Gabe runs towards the golem. He swings Sun Eater and bats the orb of electricity back at the golem. Linda quickly catches on and begins casting more lighting. Soon, Gabe is battling a lighting storm at the golem. I realize that I am watching the first implementation of the “Dead Man’s Volley Stratagem” for which Gabe and Linda would become famous. The golem falls, finally and truly dead. The steel shutters open and the old man enters.

“What the hell?” shouts Linda. “We could have been killed!”

“Nonsense,” the old man says. “I knew you would make it. Now hurry up, you need to sign some papers before they finalize your American citizenship.

Wait... we’re in the US already? It’s only been three weeks. Shouldn’t it take longer to reach America by boat from Germany?” asks Gabe, the disbelief and confusion visible on his wolfish face.

“This isn’t a normal boat you know,” the old man says. “And shift back to human, please. It will go smoother with immigration if your voice doesn’t have that shifted therianthrope sound to it. It’s bad enough that you’re supposed to be a hyper monarchist European werewolf. It would be easier if you had some American relatives, or if one of the American ethnic routs would vouch for you. You don’t want to creep them out too.